

IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE:  
YUGOSLAV CINEMA AND THE FALL OF THE YUGOSLAV DREAM

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation outlines the trajectory of Yugoslavia's decline through an examination of select works of Yugoslav cinema from the late 1960s to the late 1980s which cogently commented on their sociopolitical context. It brings together various interpretive perspectives and utilizes film studies, cultural studies, political history, and postcolonial studies to discuss how the Yugoslav society and its political system are scrutinized through allegory, satire, and genre revisionism, for instance, and to elucidate what the films contribute to discourse on the origins of Yugoslavia's violent breakup. Through a discussion of cinema, arguably the most politically subversive form of expression in the Yugoslav public sphere, this dissertation offers insight not only into why the country broke up but also, and perhaps more importantly, into what was lost when it broke up. Although it revolves around Yugoslavia's failure, the dissertation validates the egalitarian, anti-imperialist Yugoslav idea and offers a take on the country's demise that is free of Balkanist stereotypes and anti-communist paranoia common to most discussions of Yugoslavia's end. It counters the view of Yugoslavia as a dictatorship which disintegrated when dormant ethnic antagonisms of its peoples were inexplicably reawakened, and ties the emergence of ethnic nationalism to Yugoslavia's economic collapse of the 1970s and 1980s caused by the grasping reach of Western economic liberalism.

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## Preface

My relationship to this project is a deeply personal one. In this preface, I briefly outline the journey that brought me to it in order to clarify the political and ideological sentiments that shape this project as well as the biases found within it. My analysis of Yugoslav cinema, which aims to offer insight into what Yugoslavia was and why it broke up, is filtered through my own sense of loss when the country dissolved. This loss is twofold: the loss of home and of the only stable cultural identity I ever knew enmeshed with the disappearance of a country and its ideological underpinnings. For me, Yugoslavia's dissolution was not just a passing moment in the annals of European history. It was a defining moment that profoundly changed my life, and its intangible phantasmagoric effect on me is deeply integrated into my readings of the films. This dissertation, then, is not an exploration of a subject matter I selected simply because it intrigued me: I was compelled to tackle it in order to understand myself. In a very real sense, the project found me, not I it. It was, I am happy to say, a therapeutic pursuit in that it helped me regain my Yugoslav cultural identity. It provided me with a forum within which to begin to conceptualize, following more than two decades of internalizing outsiders' perceptions of what Yugoslavia was and why it is no more, a validation of the Yugoslav idea as a politically progressive one (however flawed it may have been in practice). I did this by offering a take on the country's demise that is free of Balkanist stereotypes and anti-communist paranoia, and by tying the country's break up to the grasping reach of Western economic liberalism.

I belong to the generation that grew up in the 1980s when Yugoslavia was becoming unrecognizable, and reached adulthood in the early 1990s when it descended into a civil war. The experience was not unlike the Freudian *uncanny* that Pavle of *Backbone* or Ivan of *The Rat Saviour* experience—society was being radically altered in some unsettling, but, for a young adult, difficult to define way. I was a passive observer, a subject of this process, quickly

becoming the Other in my own home. Despondent Milutin's question in *In the Name of the People*, "Did not my house use to stand here?" perhaps best defines my personal link to this project since for me, too, it is symbolic of the strange sense of having been set adrift upon losing my home. Unlike Milutin's, however, mine is not a futile question but one that locates the answer in concrete historical and political processes which *can* be defined. Owing to the temporal distance from the events which made me both homeless and stateless, I was able to take into consideration a plurality of views on the subject of what happened to Yugoslavia. Inquiries of this kind have typically been the domain of the social sciences. Though I draw on the assessments offered by political scientists, historians, sociologists, and economists, my own approach is firmly rooted in the humanities and therefore somewhat at odds with the methodology of the social sciences which relies on statistics about inflation, unemployment, or ethnic geography. It is perhaps precisely this disharmony that makes my dissertation a unique exploration of both Yugoslav cinema and Yugoslavia itself.

This dissertation is far from dispassionate or neutral: it is a work structured by my pan-Slavic socialist worldview and a complete absence of cynicism towards ideas which border on utopian as they seek to offer ways to create egalitarian societies. During the research process, I dismissed outright the inherently neocolonial accounts written by outsiders with, as writer Rebecca West puts it, "a pet Balkan people," that is, a history of maligning this or that former Yugoslav ethnic group while championing another, and I stayed away from anti-communist ones which tend to perceive Yugoslavia as an oppressive abomination (which was easy to do as the two typically intersect, anyway). Part of the driving force behind this project, and what perhaps makes it decidedly subjective rather than objective (if a claim to objectivity can be made at all), is my deep resentment of those forces which worked to undermine Yugoslavia—a tendency for

which I fail to locate a valid justification. I offer this qualification because my dissertation, in direct and indirect ways, deals with the subject of culpability for Yugoslavia's dissolution. The aim was certainly not to distribute blame but the reader will find my views regarding the roles of domestic and foreign actors involved in Yugoslavia's disintegration rather unambiguous.

Yet, a kind of surreal dreamlike opaqueness inherent to traumatic experiences is a constitutive element of this text. During the writing process I frequently made myself recall a childhood experience involving film as a reminder that what I am doing is indeed deeply subjective and to structure my approach to how Yugoslav cinema functions to shed light on what happened to Yugoslavia accordingly. School kids of my generation were often taken to local cinemas to watch reruns of Partisan war films from the 1960s and 1970s. These were well-made action epics meant to solidify our commitment to socialism by showing us the sacrifices our grandfathers had made for our freedom in World War II. On one occasion—I was nine years old at the time—my class showed up at the local cinema only to find out that there had been a booking mix up and that the film we were supposed to watch had not arrived. The only film available was the regularly scheduled one. Not wanting the trip to the movies to be a complete waste, our teacher agreed, I can only presume without making inquiries about what the film was, that we would watch it. Unfortunately for a class of third-graders, that film was *Variola Vera*, a dreary psychological horror film based on a true story about an outbreak of smallpox, meant for grown-ups able to understand its infectious disease allegory. The film started slowly. We fidgeted nervously and laughed at an occasional vulgar line of dialogue. And then it began in earnest: bloodied hospital gowns, puss-filled boils, grimacing faces, bodies writhing in agony. We screamed and held each other's hands for comfort. The teacher shushed us in vain. I felt revulsion like I had never known before. We walked out the cinema playing tag, "infecting" each

other with smallpox, immunity being granted to those who claimed to have been inoculated with Gamma Globulin (like the few lucky characters in the film), trying to make light of the experience.

This unintentional subversion of state propaganda that resulted from an innocent booking mix up remained informative for me. Instead of an epic action film in which the Nazis were machine gunned down by the dozen, we witnessed a harsh albeit allegorical criticism of the state. This, one of my most traumatic childhood memories, was a symbolic rite of passage from being a wide-eyed Tito's Pioneer to getting an idea, however vague, that my country had some serious problems. I did not understand why these problems needed to be addressed obliquely rather than directly and I did not grasp the full meaning of the film's allegory involving hellish conditions inside a quarantined Belgrade hospital, but I was sure that *Variola Vera* was not about smallpox. The characters and events in the film seemed to analogize and correspond to those involved in the "crisis" or the "situation" as the grown-ups referred to Yugoslavia's economic (and otherwise) problems in the early 1980s. I was beginning to understand why my father looked so worried—a bit like Valent of *The Dream About a Rose* (whom he even resembles). For the first time ever, I felt unsafe in my country. I began to suspect that Yugoslavia, a country I loved at least as much as I loved my parents, was crumbling. Recalling this experience helped alert me to the ability of art to have a compelling degree of cultural currency and to evoke both intellectual and visceral responses of the audiences to their social and political environment, perhaps most unsettlingly via oblique allegory. This, in turn, helped me see Yugoslav cinema as a cultural industry whose output was capable of profound insight into the time and place in which it was produced. I see the films analyzed as part of a primal need to engage with each other through art. These are the stories we told ourselves in the latter half of the twentieth century and they likely



served the same purpose as the stories our ancestors might have told each other around the campfire (in my imagination, before they divided into antagonistic tribes) while trying to understand themselves—their past, present, and future. Ultimately, what I have attempted to do in this project was ascertain what insight into Yugoslavia the thirteen films analyzed, *Variola Vera* included, have to offer.

This text puts forth my personal view of the events I address and I *use* the films to contextualize those views and to present a subjective narrative of what occurred in Yugoslavia. The films tell my story. This then is not a pseudo-authoritative master narrative of Yugoslavia. It is not even a master narrative of my own experience. Rather, like those of Veselin and Braco of *Maternal Half-Brothers*, it is one of many which even when they contradict one another, together comprise a more complete picture and speak to what happened to those who called ourselves Yugoslavs. I am almost hesitant to qualify my dissertation this way because, after all, any form of expression is bound to be a personal view—a fiction constructed by the author's worldview. The need to both express my grief and to understand its causes are the driving forces behind the fiction inherent in my inquiry, via cinema, into what made Yugoslavia what it was and what led to its demise.

Perhaps the biggest challenge to this text might come in the form of criticism of the bias necessitated by my Yugonostalgia which, the argument might go, predisposed me to look kindly on some and overly critically on others involved in Yugoslavia's internal political upheavals. Admittedly, I do not go out of my way to make my arguments balanced. I strongly believe that, to paraphrase writer Muharem Bazdulj, rarely does good writing come from balance—it comes from passionate partisanship. Though my Yugonostalgia certainly ensured that whoever worked to tear down Yugoslavia is duly criticised for it, I stand by the views expressed in this text as I

see them as wholly unmalicious and never derisive in respect to any former Yugoslav ethnic group. In any case, once my research develops further and this text becomes a monograph, I suspect that some of what may now be perceived as imbalance will likely be at least slightly corrected by inclusion of more films—by expanding the fiction told here. The balance-seeking critics, however, are likely to be dismayed by what will be an even stronger validation of Yugoslavia's progressive practices like the workers' self-management (giving the workers control over means of production) and radical steps towards withering away the state through decentralization (ensuring that decision are made as locally as possible), and by my even stronger criticism of those who, completely contrary to the spirit of Yugoslavia's constitutional changes, cynically and unwisely used decentralization to extricate themselves from Yugoslavia and plunge it into a civil war.

The fates of countries and their citizens should not hinge on how good they are at capitalism. I have vivid memories of my working class parents struggling to navigate the system in which they were involved in practical terms and in the best of faith—as union representatives and workers' council leaders. I watched them become dispensable, stupefied by the shock of Yugoslavia's transition into a state unrecognizable to them. Like the characters of some of the films I examine, they saw the connotative meaning of Yugoslavia vanish not because there was something inherently wrong with the workers' self-management system which gave both them and Yugoslavia itself identity but because of the encroachment of liberal capitalism from outside. I remember midday electricity and water restrictions and even occasional food shortages on account of austerity measures insisted upon by organizations whose names were terse foreign acronyms, organizations that demanded economic reforms which contradicted the spirit of the self-management system and eventually left the workers without a voice—a voice many soon

found in ethnic antagonisms. It is precisely the soul-crushing consequences of this imposed shift from socialism towards capitalism—from one system of values to another—for ordinary citizens that I wanted to depict. No economist, historian, sociologist or political scientist can describe how this dynamic might have felt for the Yugoslavs, but this dissertation exists because I believe that *Variola Vera* did. Put bluntly, this project owes everything to my nine year old self and to the memory of my parents.

## Introduction

### On the Margins of Europe at the Center of the World: Yugoslavia and Its Cinema

The peoples of Yugoslavia do not want fascism. They do not want a totalitarian regime, they do not want to become slaves of the German and Italian financial oligarchy as they never wanted to become reconciled to the semi-colonial dependence imposed on them by the so-called Western democracies after the first imperialist war.

—Josip Broz Tito

Broadly, this dissertation focuses on the cinema of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia and examines the ways Yugoslav filmmakers depicted the country's sociopolitical context from the late 1960s, when the country, like much of Europe, experienced major political upheavals, to the late 1980s, shortly before it broke up. This text is not an inclusive survey of Yugoslav cinema of that era—giants like Aleksandar Petrović, or the *Prague School* filmmakers are not discussed, and neither are the avant-garde or documentary genres. It is one that discusses thirteen feature films, chosen after painstaking consideration, in order to examine how nuances of the Yugoslav socialist project are reflected upon by what was arguably the most politically subversive form of expression in the Yugoslav public sphere. I focus on both overtly and obliquely politically deft films which constitute instructive instances of examination and assessment of the Yugoslav political, social and economic crises. I chose to concentrate on the roughly twenty-year period because this was the most eventful and tumultuous era in the political history of the “new,” socialist Yugoslavia during which the Yugoslav film industry produced correspondingly intensely politically engaged works. The 1960s saw the first openly irreverent Yugoslav films which questioned both the political and economic direction in which the political elite was taking the country. Though somewhat diluted in the 1970s by the spate of state-sponsored films which sought to elicit a new enthusiasm for the Yugoslav brand of socialism by depicting the mythical Partisan battles against the Nazis in World War II, Yugoslav cinema continued to weigh in on the general sense of disillusionment with the state. By the 1980s, some

films even dared to suggest that Yugoslavia was headed for a violent breakup on account of a history of ethnic discord aggravated by the country's economic and political instability. More precisely then, this dissertation outlines the dynamics of the gradual unraveling of the Yugoslav socialist project as depicted in Yugoslav cinema, with an emphasis on the confluence of economic, political, and historical circumstances that led to the country's violent dissolution.

My approach consists of rigorous textual analysis which always maintains the linearity of my arguments from which emerge the contours of a chronological narrative about Yugoslavia. Though most films discussed lend themselves to different theoretical paths, the overarching framework is found in the Lockean view that Yugoslav cinema as a cultural industry was able to formulate *new* knowledge of and insight into its sociopolitical environment via “reflection” in the form of allegory, satire, or genre revisionism, among other approaches. According to John Locke, knowledge and ideas about our environment come from experience which is either one of “sensation” or “reflection.” The former conveys to us what we perceive directly through our senses while the latter produces new ideas “being such only as the mind gets by reflecting on its own operations within itself.”<sup>1</sup> I deem the thirteen films examined to be a part of the “reflection” mechanism by which the Yugoslav society sought to assess and understand itself. It is, of course, with the benefit of hindsight that I chose the thirteen films because I recognized them as works of their moment—uniquely in tune with what I ascertained to have been the social and political climate of their time. As I extrapolate what knowledge and ideas about Yugoslavia the thirteen films, which range from Brechtian formal exercises to appropriations of “low brow” genres like the slasher, have to offer, I combine film studies with cultural studies, political history, and

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<sup>1</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689; repr., Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1995), 110.

postcolonial studies to provide a portrait of the socialist Yugoslavia—both what happened and how it was understood upon “reflection.”

I see the chief contribution to scholarship on Yugoslav cinema of this dissertation as twofold. Little has been written about Yugoslav cinema—most of the works I discuss have not been previously examined at all. More significantly, as I deploy my arguments, even when in agreement with the films’ criticism of the Yugoslav system, I never question the validity of the Yugoslav idea. Almost all discourse on Yugoslavia and its breakup has been biased by rabid anti-communist paranoia and odious Balkanist stereotypes. Woven into my analysis of the films is a rejection of interpretations of Yugoslavia’s breakup which propose that atavistic jingoistic passions appeared among the Yugoslavs, especially the stubbornly communist Serbs who, the argument typically goes, sensing that their hegemonic grip on Yugoslavia was slipping, attacked other Yugoslav peoples in order to retain it. Such views were proliferated in the 1990s by Western politicians, media pundits, historians, and journalists who, aghast at the “savagery” of Balkan tribes, called for “humanitarian” bombings while celebrating the end of Yugoslavia as another victory for Western democracy and capitalism. My analysis of the films implicitly indicts the view of Yugoslavia as a repressive regime which struggled to oversee its “uncivilized” peoples. Such views tend to see the Balkans as a European frontier akin to the mythical Wild West, and explain Yugoslavia’s breakup along ethnic lines by perpetuating the stereotype of an innate inability to organize a peaceful society. My analysis of the films is designed to suggest that internal and external factors—vestiges of foreign imperialism, Cold War dynamics, process of European integration, capitalism and its global neocolonial reach, economic crisis, debt and the resulting political and economic reforms—converged to destabilize Yugoslavia, lead to ethnic discord, and bring about the country’s end.

“Did not my house used to stand here?” asks Milutin of Živko Nikolić’s *In the Name of the People* (1987) upon realizing that his newly-built home had been razed to the ground by crooked policemen. The question, of course, asks the late 1980s Yugoslav spectators to consider what has become of the just socialist country they had been promised. Throughout my analysis of the thirteen films, I pose and attempt to answer the same question as well as the one inherent in it: Why Yugoslavia? The films analyzed take a persuasively critical view of the Yugoslav political structures. I engage the films’ criticism of the system never losing sight of the fact that Yugoslavia was “invented” to ensure peace, stability, equality, dignity, self-sufficiency for peoples who toiled under various colonial powers for centuries, and who, following World War II, were reluctant to accept the global encroachment of the inherently neocolonialist capitalist economic system. As imperfect as it was, Yugoslavia was the optimal home for the South Slavs who, trodden on by empires and invaders for centuries, divided by nationalism and religion, could finally organize their political environment without outside meddling, and even under a new identity—that of the supra-national Yugoslav designation. This text is undoubtedly biased by my nostalgia for Yugoslavia, and I suspect an attentive reader will be able to discern that underneath its straightforward objective—to discuss the Yugoslav society via an exploration of Yugoslav cinema—also lies a condemnation of the internal forces which persistently and, my analysis of the films consistently implies, shortsightedly sought to destroy Yugoslavia in order to achieve narrow ethnic objectives. What follows then is also a personal lament for Yugoslavia—no longer a place but an idea to which I remain bound. Milutin’s question is my question, too.

Why then did Yugoslavia not only fail to deliver on its promise but collapse in a bloody ethnic war, seemingly as if some of its peoples never believed in the promise, deeply resented the novelty of a supra-national identity, and *wanted* the country to collapse? This question structures

this dissertation and forms the chief conceptual thread that runs through my analysis of the thirteen films. I write this on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir apparent to the Austro-Hungarian throne, by Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb who was considered a Yugoslav national hero. In what used to be Yugoslavia, the anniversary is controversial and exposes ethnic divisions along the lines that mirror the historical attitudes of its peoples towards Yugoslavia itself. Those who appeared eager to extricate themselves from Yugoslavia and from socialism (roughly the country's western portion) today see Princip as a cold-blooded murderer while those who wanted to remain socialist and maintain Yugoslavia (the eastern part of the country) see him as a fighter against foreign imperialism. This dissertation deals with precisely this division, especially when it ventures into the touchy subject of the chain of events that led to Yugoslavia's dissolution. It discusses how there came to be, as the historian Maria Todorova puts it, such great "differences within one type"—how the western part of the country came to see itself as civilizationally advanced, a fact presumably manifested in its eagerness to leave Yugoslavia, embrace Western-style democracy and capitalism, while looking down on the "Byzantine" backwardness of the eastern part of the country, supposedly evident in its loyalty to socialist values and to the Yugoslav idea.<sup>2</sup>

My investigation into the roots of these "differences" necessitated that my scrutiny of the thirteen films touch not only on Yugoslav but also on pre-Yugoslav history and politics. Later in this introduction I provide broad contours of the more distant historical and political background

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<sup>2</sup> Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19. (only the phrase "differences within one type") During the research process I found out just how divisive a topic these "differences" and their impact on Yugoslavia's demise tends to be—thoroughly researched sources of scholarly value offered divergent depictions of Yugoslavia's history, culture and politics. Some of these sources, however, were written by authors with a history of maligning one of Yugoslav peoples as incorrigibly bellicose, while championing another as inherently freedom-loving. I stayed away from such partisan sources as well as from those that that malign Yugoslavia as repressive communist edifice. Naturally, I opted for the ones with which I found myself aligned ideologically.



to contextualize my analysis of the films, which, in order to remain streamlined, assumes the reader's awareness of this overview as it focuses on the films' more immediate sociopolitical contexts. This overview addresses the subordinate status of the territories that would eventually comprise Yugoslavia within the European cultural, political, and power hierarchy. It involves glances at Yugoslavia's inception following the power shifts and revisions of European borders after World War I as well as a look at the romantic nationalism-inspired nineteenth century roots of the Yugoslav idea which emerged while the region was still under Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman rules. I particularly focus on the severely neglected subject of the ethnic divisions these twin imperial presences produced in the territory of future Yugoslavia, and stress that Yugoslavia was a postcolonial context within which several nations enjoyed sovereignty for the first time in their histories. This emphasis on how the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian overlords, who too often drew, to quote the British literary scholar, Andrew Hammond, "insensitive borders," first necessitated Yugoslavia's creation and then, ironically, ensured its demise by instilling in the future Yugoslavs the notion that the relative west is inherently more civilized than the relative east, is integral to my discussion of the ethnic discord "reflected" on by some of the films.<sup>3</sup>

This east-west dichotomy gifted to Yugoslavia by its imperial overlords is also relevant to my analysis of films that have as their subtext Yugoslavia's later interactions with entities like the European Community (EC) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which exacerbated ethnic divisions by keeping parts of Yugoslavia out of Europe on account of their economic underdevelopment and by plunging the country deep into debt, in turn aggravating the economic crisis which, as the political writer Diana Johnstone argues, resulted from Yugoslavia's "failed

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Hammond, "The Uses of Balkanism: Representation and Power in British Travel Writing, 1850-1914," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 82, no. 3 (2004): 615. (only the phrase "insensitive borders")

efforts to adapt to the world capitalist system”—efforts insisted upon by these very entities.<sup>4</sup> The historical overview also runs through some of the landmark events in the political life of socialist Yugoslavia. My analysis of the thirteen films builds on this background and involves further discussion of events like the Tito-Stalin split and Yugoslavia’s subsequent expulsion from the Cominform in 1948, the appearance of the New Class (elite politicians in control of all economic and political matters), economic prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s as it gave way to the economic crisis which reached its apex in the 1970s and 1980s, the 1968 student demonstrations which pushed for democratic and economic reforms, the appearance in the early 1970s of the “liberal” forces which demanded democratization and decentralization, the 1974 Constitution which accommodated many of those demands, and likely paved the way for Yugoslavia’s disintegration, and the increase, in the 1980s, in the popular interest in historical traumas and the subsequent explosion of ethnic nationalism. As I outline these events, I define the Yugoslav Dream and stress that behind this notion rested a simple but ultimately unfulfilled desire of the South Slavs to live in a progressive egalitarian society and to be free of outside political and economic meddling. Yugoslavia cannot be understood without grasping the idealism behind the Yugoslav Dream, nor can it be understood what was lost when Yugoslavia collapsed. Ultimately, that unfulfilled potential and that loss are precisely what my dissertation is about.

This work is divided into three chapters, each of which deals with a particular aspect of the Yugoslav Dream and its depiction in cinema, though there is some overlap of topics discussed from chapter to chapter. The progression is roughly chronological except in cases of a handful of films whose subject matter makes them better suited to be discussed before or after their “rightful” turn. My examination of how the loss of the Yugoslav Dream has been depicted

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<sup>4</sup> Diana Johnstone, *Fool’s Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002), 20.

in Yugoslav cinema begins with the second wave of liberalization of Yugoslav society, when the state, although still not tolerant of extreme forms of dissent, jettisoned strict guidelines and draconian censorship laws, enabling filmmakers to articulate cogent criticism of the state in their works. Guided by a milder version of the Stalinist-Zhdanovist dogma of socialist realist art, post-World War II film production in Yugoslavia was tightly controlled by the state and served its propaganda purposes.<sup>5</sup> Until the 1950s, Yugoslav cinema was strictly tasked with celebrating the revolutionary struggle of World War II and the socialist ideals on which this new and improved incarnation of Yugoslavia was built. The conflict in the late 1940s with the Soviet Union resulted in Yugoslavia's removal from the Cominform, followed by the process of de-Stalinization (or rather, Titoization) in the early 1950s. With it came more relaxed attitudes towards personal freedoms (except, of course, for those who remained devoted to Stalin), political decentralization, opening up to the West, the beginnings of market socialism and workers' self-management system as well as the removal of dogma that had governed film production. The filmmakers were able to eschew the up-to-now obligatory idealization of Yugoslav socialism, and express more critical attitudes towards the society; even the topic of the revolutionary struggle of World War II was now approached with "a new realism."<sup>6</sup>

The 1960s, a period of even further liberalization, brought with it a new brand of filmmakers. Yugoslavia's first authentic film movement, *New Film*, emerged in the early 1960s,

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel Goulding, *Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience, 1945-2001*, rev. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), xi. For an overview of Yugoslav film industry, including ideological and thematic leanings, from World War II through the 1950s, see Petar Volk, "Balada o trubi i maglama," in Branko Belan, *Sjaj i bijeda filma* (Zagreb: Epoha, 1966), 281-335. For more on development of film industry in post war Yugoslavia, including industrial organization, ideological direction, and censorship, see Petar Volk, *Istorija jugoslovenskog filma* (Belgrade: Institut za film, 1986), 128-135.

<sup>6</sup> David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film*, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 745.

and boldly challenged the Yugoslav establishment by criticizing the bloated and inefficient bureaucracy, deficiencies of the workers' self-management system, corruption and entitlement of the political elites. By the end of the decade, the movement had acquired the moniker *Black Wave*, and by the early 1970s, its flagship auteurs had either stopped making films or left the country.<sup>7</sup> While some *Black Wave* films merely expressed disillusionment, others called for revolutionary changes, in turn, calling attention to "the role of art in transforming the society."<sup>8</sup> Stories about directionless young outsiders unable to benefit from socialist prosperity exposed the system's inherent inequalities. In doing so, *Black Wave* films echoed the sentiments of the most prominent Yugoslav dissident, Milovan Djilas, whose 1957 polemical indictment of the Yugoslav bureaucratic elite, *The New Class*, assessed Yugoslavia as a highly stratified, class-based society ruled by corrupt politicians who shun egalitarianism, see political control as a form of property, and are unlikely to give it up without a revolution. *Black Wave* was also loosely in alignment with the *Praxis School*, a philosophical movement which, from 1963 to 1975, developed ideas held by Yugoslav communists who were leaning towards Marxist humanism—a rejection of all dogmatism, and further democratization and liberalization. *Black Wave* films put Yugoslavia on the world's cultural map by raising the profile of the country as a major contributor to a series of filmmaking "waves" of the 1960s which challenged the political establishments around the world, and also made respectable sums of money from overseas

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<sup>7</sup> Because it was first applied by an establishment-friendly film critic, and meant as a slight, the moniker is rejected by some Yugoslav film scholars, but it remains commonly used, and I prefer to employ it as it does sum-up the tendency of the films to paint the Yugoslav reality darkly and unromantically.

<sup>8</sup> Gal Kirn, "New Yugoslav Cinema—A Humanist Cinema? Not Really," in *Surfing the Black: Yugoslav Black Wave Cinema and Its Transgressive Moments*, eds. Gal Kirn, Dubravka Sekuli and Žiga Testen (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academie, 2012), 18.

distribution.<sup>9</sup> So, rather than banning them outright, the state made it difficult for the more “problematic” *Black Wave* filmmakers to secure funding at home and “encouraged” some to leave the country for the West, where, ironically, they were highly appreciated.

Chapter One is dedicated entirely to *Black Wave* and its engagement with the politically turbulent 1960s. Unified not by aesthetic but rather by political and ideological concerns, *Black Wave* filmmakers likely felt inspired and emboldened when, in June of 1968, Belgrade was hit by street and university campus demonstrations in which thousands of students clashed with the police and demanded changes—democratization, greater freedoms, jobs, removal of the inept political elites entrenched in power—explicitly questioning the substance of the Yugoslav Dream. That the establishment partly blamed the *Praxis School* for the unrest made sense, but the youths questioning their bright socialist future had even more strident advocates among the *Black Wave* filmmakers. In this chapter, I discuss the ideological alignment of four *Black Wave* films with the 1968 student demonstrations, while also paying attention to the films’ either detached modernist aesthetic which methodically (and cynically) exposed social inequality and political dogmatism, or a social realist one which located hardship and abjection where there was supposed to be only socialist contentment. My discussion of the four films focuses on how they address the first major cracks in the veneer of the Yugoslav Dream, specifically their depictions

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<sup>9</sup> Though Yugoslav filmmakers whose films were “problematic” did not face the kind of repressive measures that filmmakers in other socialist countries did, if they caught the attention of Tito, an avid film-lover who employed a full-time projectionist, they were likely to be “encouraged” to tone down their anti-establishment sentiments. An often told apocryphal story suggests that after watching Želimir Žilnik’s *Early Works* (1969), Tito exclaimed: “What do these lunatics want?!” While there were definite no-go zones for filmmakers (Tito himself, for example), an offense had to be a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the state in order to draw attention. There was not a precise mechanism by which films were banned. The censors typically suggested changes be made to films (and often never fully enforced them) rather than banned films outright. In the spirit of self-management, distributors and producers were tasked with administering self-censorship—they had to prevent from being realized those works which were “anti-Yugoslav.” Sometimes an unofficial ban would come into effect after a politician, having seen the film, objected to it and his underlings eagerly sought to suppress it in order to please him. From recollections by several *Black Wave* filmmakers in a documentary television series titled *Zabranjeni bez zabrane*, directed by Dinko Tucaković and Milan Nikodijević, 2007.

of the mechanisms by which the political elites, responsible for the economic crisis and rampant unemployment, fostered a politically dogmatic class system full of economic inequality, and made a mockery of the workers' self-management system by making its sole purpose be to create an illusion that the workers were in control.

*Ambush* (Živojin Pavlović, 1969) addresses the disappearance of authentic revolutionary socialist ideals which insist on improvement and drive change for the common good, and their replacement with agendas of careerists, conformists, and opportunists interested only in their own gain and ready to compromise without regret. *When I'm Dead and Gone* (Živojin Pavlović, 1969) is about an unemployed, untalented wannabe singer who lives off the kindness of the desperate women he meets, and who dies a pathetic, meaningless death after realizing that the future holds nothing but misery and hardship. In *Early Works* (Želimir Žilnik, 1969), confounded by their own ideological ineptitude and by the harshness of life in rural Yugoslavia, four hip young communists fail in their quest to take the spirit of socialist revolution to the masses. In an examination of the relationship between sexual repression and institutional repression, Dušan Makavejev's *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (1971) depicts Yugoslav youth desperate for greater political and personal freedoms, but unsure of how to achieve them because even as the social and political structure evolves and changes, it remains reliant on didactic revolutionary romanticism, indoctrination, and cults of personality. I examine how the films illuminate aspects of Yugoslavia's sociopolitical dynamics and, in turn, point to the disappearance of the Yugoslav Dream, by discussing each film through the prism of the notion of realism. Philosopher Erich Fromm's contrasting notions of "positive" and "negative" freedom form the framework for my analysis of Pavlović as a borderline anti-humanist whose films "expose the reality in its

revolutionary development” in a harsh social realist tradition.<sup>10</sup> I discuss his films as examples of realist cinema with minimally intrusive aesthetics valued by André Bazin, and as cinematic equivalents of anti-modernist literary realism valued by Georg Lukács whereby even abstract depictions of characters’ subjective experiences are capable of profound insight into objective reality. I contrast Pavlović’s approach with modernist experiments, formally indebted to Bertolt Brecht’s didactic Epic Theatre and to the montage aesthetic of Sergei Eisenstein, of Makavajev’s and Žilnik’s films which can be said to fall into the category of *Praxis School*-inspired Marxist humanism in that they expose “the discrepancy between official ideology and historical reality.”<sup>11</sup>

The aesthetic vibrancy and political boldness of *Black Wave* was never quite matched by any other tendency in Yugoslav cinema, but films continued to be made which dealt with the darker side of Yugoslav reality. In Chapter Two I discuss films which, though less audacious stylistically and formally, continued the tradition of biting social critique and seemed to have little belief in the socialist system because, they maintained, the country was *still* being mismanaged and led into a financial ruin by the greedy New Class elites. The background to this chapter is the economic crisis and drastic reduction in standards of living in the 1970s and 1980s caused by the austerity measures insisted upon by the IMF in order to restructure Yugoslavia’s economy and enable the country to repay the high interest loans given to it by the financial organization. Also part of this background is the EC’s insistence on economic and political reforms which facilitated ethnic discord by promoting feelings of exceptionalism in Yugoslav republics better predisposed to administer such changes. In the first portion of the chapter, I

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<sup>10</sup> Kirn, “New Yugoslav Cinema,” 23.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

discuss three films which blend science fiction and psychological horror genres, and employ the trope of disease as a metaphor for Yugoslavia's transformation into a society on the brink of economic collapse. In the allegorical *The Rat Saviour* (Krstó Papi , 1976), the masses are manipulated and exploited by a race of rat-like shapeshifters, reminiscent of the New Class, who have infiltrated all walks of life. The Yugoslavia of *Backbone* (Vlatko Gili , 1975) is plagued by a mysterious disease—a metaphor for citizens' disillusionment and anger—which drives the infected to suicide and survivors to turn on each other. *Variola Vera* (Goran Markovi , 1982) deals with the true story of the 1972 outbreak of smallpox which necessitated a quarantine of Belgrade's main hospital and an involvement of the World Health Organization (WHO)—a thinly veiled reference to the IMF's involvement in Yugoslavia's affairs. Threaded through my discussion of the three films is Freud's concept of the *uncanny* which I use to illuminate how the films allude to the gap between what Yugoslavia was expected to become—a just socialist society—and what it has become: a class-based society whose socialist values have been eroded.

The second half of the chapter deals with three films which depict the erosion of the power of the working class—an absurdity in a socialist society—and an almost complete dismantling of the workers' self-management system. I utilize Natalie Zemon Davis' discussion of historical films able to distill the spirit of the era they depict by reinventing it rather than through accuracy of historical detail to examine *In the Name of the People* (Živko Nikoli , 1987), a film dealing with the repercussions of the infamous surveillance scandal, which saw the country's top policeman, Aleksandar Rankovi , sent into semi-exile in 1966, on the ordinary working people. I rely on director and critic Paul Schrader's discussion of film noir to examine the ways *The Dream About a Rose* (Zoran Tadi , 1986), a working class film noir, utilizes the genre's tropes to depict the desperation of an honest, law abiding family man struggling to



survive in a Yugoslavia increasingly controlled by criminals—both those holding political office and those operating on the streets. I employ Milica Bakić-Hayden's discussion of Balkanism to deal with *Rams and Mammoths* (Filip Robar Dorin, 1985), a film about the experiences of migrant workers from underdeveloped parts of the country looking for work elsewhere in Yugoslavia but finding only prejudice and discrimination. My discussion of the six films develops against the background of Yugoslavia's ill-advised attempts to integrate into global capitalist economy, especially the efforts towards establishing closer ties with Western Europe, and the resulting internal struggles between the forces advocating a return to a more centralized state and those arguing for further political and economic liberalization. Ultimately, my discussion functions to outline yet another phase of erosion of the Yugoslav Dream: the entrenchment in power of the decidedly un-socialist New Class who effectively ended the workers' self-management, facilitated the economic crisis and dependence on foreign borrowing, which, in turn, severely destabilized the Yugoslav system by exposing class divisions and inequality between different regions of the country and even spurred on ethnic divisions.

In Chapter Three, I focus on the films made during the end of the Yugoslav era bookended by Yugoslavia's president-for-life Josip Broz Tito's death in 1980 and by the ethnic war of the early 1990s. From those final years of Yugoslavia's existence, I deal with films which strongly hint that the country might be dysfunctional beyond repair—films that seem to no longer believe in the Yugoslav socialist project, anticipate the country's dissolution, and even prophecy its apocalyptic end. The films' pessimism is hardly surprising given Yugoslavia's sociopolitical dynamics at the time. The economic crisis seemed to bring to the surface festering ethnic grievances planted during the region's pre-Yugoslav imperial subjugation. To make matters worse, the preference of the EC to trade (and otherwise deal) with the more economically

advanced parts of the country firmed up the division between the “backward” east and “civilized” west of the country. The atmosphere was one of impending doom as touchy subjects involving inter-ethnic relations and historical traumas came to dominate public discourse. A trend of re-examination of Yugoslav history, especially of the roles of different Yugoslav ethnicities in World War II—a subject rarely discussed in depth until the 1980s—turned into paranoia and cults of victimhood, and eventually into ethnic scapegoating. The country was beginning to dissolve as talk of imminent secession of this or that republic unsettled the public. Nationalist rhetoric, which went into overdrive when it became obvious that territorial claims of different ethnic groups overlapped, served as a prologue to the catastrophe of the early 1990s.

The chapter focuses on three films which seem to suggest that the ethnic discord, driven by the worsening economic crisis of post-Tito Yugoslavia, is so severe that it might unravel the country. *Maternal Half-Brothers* (Zdravko Šotra, 1988) deals with the Serb-Croat rift by examining how two half-brothers were affected by the genocide committed by the Ustashe, elite military units of the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, commonly referred to by the acronym NDH), on the Serbs in World War II. *Dangerous Trail* (Miomir Stamenković, 1984) deals with the Albanian irredentists’ campaign, which picked up steam in the 1980s, to rid the Serbian province of Kosovo of its Serb inhabitants and secede from Yugoslavia. My discussion of the two films revolves around how they address the looming shadow of the infamous 1974 Constitution which so radically decentralized Yugoslavia that, many argued, it effectively paved the way for Yugoslavia’s dissolution, causing some, especially the Serbs, to lament the fall of Yugoslavia’s staunchest centralist, Aleksandar Ranković. Both films seem to suggest that the processes of Yugoslavia’s decentralization and democratization were actually driven by ethnic nationalism and secessionist motives, couched in disingenuous

resentment of the perceived Serb economic and political domination. They suggest that Yugoslavia's constitutional reforms worked to invite meddling by Yugoslav ethnic nationalists of one ilk or another living in the West who saw Yugoslavia as a repressive edifice. I discuss how the two films deal with the subject of the so-called "emigration"—those who left the country for ideological reasons and actively worked from the West to destroy Yugoslavia and "liberate" their co-ethnics by restoring an idealized pre-Yugoslav society—by relying on historian Benedict Anderson's notion of "long-distance nationalism" as well as on literary and cultural studies scholar Svetlana Boym's discussion of nostalgia.

While *Maternal Half-Brothers* and *Dangerous Trail* question the validity of the notion of "Brotherhood and Unity," *Déjà vu* (Goran Marković, 1987) seems to suggest that peaceful coexistence is about to be replaced with conflict and war. I analyze *Déjà vu*, a slasher horror film about a man driven to madness by his obsession with the tragic fate of his parents who were persecuted for being enemy collaborators after World War II, relying on film scholar Robin Wood's concept of "incoherent texts"—ideologically confused yet insightful films—as well as on film scholar Carol Clover's feminist assessment of the slasher genre. I especially focus on the symbolism of the main character's obsession with the past which eventually explodes into an uncontrollable murderous rage, and suggest that it anticipates the arrival of politicians who, in the early 1990s, used Yugoslavs' obsessions with historical trauma to manipulate their co-ethnics, gain or retain power, and lead Yugoslavia into war. Overall, my discussion suggests that the three films locate in the country's constitutional instability and breakdown of interethnic relationships the beginnings of the catastrophe of the 1990s and hint not only that "Brotherhood and Unity" component of the Yugoslav Dream is now void but question if there still is (or even if there ever was) a Yugoslavia at all.

Conclusion focuses principally on recapping and reiterating the main points of the dissertation while also stressing that Yugoslavia's destruction brought its peoples little more than neocolonial dependence—"humanitarian" bombings, perpetual political and economic instability, and loss of sovereignty. Instead of a single entity, and therefore better positioned to negotiate global political and economic currents while looking out for the best interest of its peoples, there are now several antagonistic, highly socially stratified societies run by oligarchic political elites beholden to various foreign interests and actors who aim not to aid but to exploit their "client" states.

#### Yugoslavia's European Dream

The land sweeps on as one; there is no line to mark where Occident ends and Orient begins; but somewhere down there the order of things reverses.

—Frederick Moore, *The Balkan Trail*

Until the formation of Yugoslavia, the South Slavs were rarely in control of their own societies. About two thirds of the territory of the future Yugoslavia, the eastern part of the country, remained occupied by the Ottoman Empire for four centuries, while the western part was integrated into Austro-Hungarian Empire. Although some of the future Yugoslav peoples at different times managed to secure limited autonomy, they remained either marginalized or enslaved. An important consequence of both imperial occupations was that the future Yugoslav peoples did not get to form nation states when most other Europeans did, nor did they establish political and cultural alliances and connections with other Europeans on an equal footing. Those under the Ottomans fared much worse as they were effectively deleted from Europe. That they were unable to reintegrate into Europe as independent nations when the opportunity presented itself after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire is, however, the responsibility of the European powers who tended to see the Balkan upstarts as uncivilized barbarians who did not belong to the

European cultural sphere. After the two imperial powers departed, there remained, running through the middle of what would become Yugoslavia, a line of division between the Oriental (Byzantine, at best), “backward” eastern regions and the “civilized” (though not on par with Western Europe) western regions. This division was a major obstacle in the process of joining of the South Slavs into one state, and even once the country was formed, this “border” remained a factor in how the country was perceived from within and from without because of the perception of “irreconcilable” cultural differences between the global East and West. The east of the country was perceived as dogmatic and undemocratic, the west as liberal and progressive. The “border” was an obstacle to ethnic harmony as well—differences in the level of economic development between regions (the west was far more developed partly because it inherited more advanced infrastructure from its colonizers than the east) often caused inter-republican friction.

The Western perception of much of the Balkans as marginally European at best has been operational since the Ottoman conquest but became especially pronounced during the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Western Europe faced the problem of having to reintegrate the Balkans into Europe “proper.” As the Ottoman Empire weakened and crumbled, the subjugated Balkan Christians began to look towards a European future. Western Europe, however, perceived the Balkans as an aberration which, having been “Orientalized,” could not be expected to achieve the West’s civilizational standards. Throughout the nineteenth century when the Balkan independence movements needed European support the most, many major European powers like Great Britain saw the Balkan Christians as no better than their own colonial subjects: unfit to self-govern.<sup>12</sup> The rivalries among European powers

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<sup>12</sup> When Balkan Christians fought back against their Ottoman overlords, the rebellions were not just squashed but usually followed by mass slaughter of civilians. I refer specifically to Christians because Balkan converts to Islam were for all practical purposes considered Turks, and generally hoped for survival of the Ottoman Empire, and therefore of their privileged way of life. Typically, once the word of Ottoman massacres of Christians

meant that Balkan upstarts were pawns in power struggles. The Russians advocated independent Slavic states in the Balkans which the British saw as a Russian expansionist ploy and supported the dying Ottoman Empire, denying the Balkan peoples their right to independence.<sup>13</sup>

That their fate was in the hands of European powers was not lost on Balkan Christians—public opinion in places like London mattered. Balkan Christians lobbied European powers, hoping for support for their cause. The dynamic of begging to be heard and considered was made additionally divisive by Western politicians and philanthropists who sometimes selected only one Balkan people as deserving of Western attention and worthy of independence. They tended to champion their “pet Balkan people” by trying to convince the public that their favourites have

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reached the Great Powers, the reaction was one of horror and outrage with nothing done to actually assist the subjects of the Ottoman Empire in their struggles to free themselves from subjugation. Discussing the Balkanist discourse found in British travel writing of the time, which suggested a dichotomy consisting of the savage Christian Slavs and despotic but noble and civilized Turks, which provided “proof” of correctness of the British foreign policy in the Balkans, literary scholar Andrew Hammond suggests that it is hardly surprising that the British encouraged the kind of popular representation of the Balkans “that would vindicate the denial of self-rule to Balkan populations; the projection of irrationality, savagery, and prejudice onto indigenes [...] was clearly the answer, indicating a region unable to govern itself peaceably and therefore in need of administration from without.” Andrew Hammond, “Imagined Colonialism: Victorian Travellers in South East Europe,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 28, no. 2 (2006): 100. As only peripherally European, and therefore hardly civilized enough to be pitied, Balkan Christians tended to be thought of as equivalent to Britain’s own colonial subjects, and better left in someone else’s “care.” Hammond points out: “A non-British colony like the Balkans [...] was treated [by the British] with the same vilification. The consensus was that this was a swathe of barbarous territory, geographically Europe perhaps, but defined by such tribalism and violence that its peoples marked an alien, outlandish presence on European soil.” Hammond, “Imagined Colonialism,” 87-88.

<sup>13</sup> British Turcophilia ensured inaction following Turkish reprisals against Slavs’ rebellions, leaving the Slavs with no one to look to for help except the Russians. The British Empire, however, had a stake in propping up the Ottoman claim to the Balkans in order to maintain its own colonial possessions. Fearing Russian expansionism and its potential for disrupting British routes to the Far East, the British actively assisted the Ottomans in their efforts to hold onto their Balkan territory. In a letter to the editor of *The Times*, urging the government to intervene and secure autonomy and self-rule for Macedonia, following the failed Ilinden Uprising of 1903, British politician and Balkan activist, Noel Buxton, alludes to the cynical maneuvering by the British vis-à-vis the Balkan Christians under the Ottomans. He refers to the outcome of the Congress of Berlin as amounting to a sabotage by the British of the Treaty of San Stefano by which Macedonia was taken away from the Ottoman Empire and made a part of Bulgaria. In Berlin, Macedonia was *given back* to the Ottoman Empire in order to thwart Russian plans for a strong Bulgarian state, friendly to its interests. That the Macedonians had rebelled was hardly surprising, Buxton argued; that Macedonian civilians are now suffering, he implied, was a consequence of the British foreign policy. Noel Buxton, letter to the editor, *Times*, September 12, 1903.

finally become “properly” European whereas all others are still “Balkan.”<sup>14</sup> The stigma attached to being “Balkan” was (and still is) a distinct part of the legacy of Ottoman imperialism in the region. In the imaginations of the Yugoslav peoples, the term “Balkan” always more fully described someone else—someone relatively geographically more eastern and therefore less European than they were.<sup>15</sup> The underhanded strategies of European powers produced a highly polarized region, and a political dynamic in which the Western actors were positioned as defenders of Western values against the encroachment of Russia’s Eastern Orthodoxy presumed to be positioning itself to replace the Islamic Turks. This polarization situated the Catholic Slovenes and Croats—almost “proper” Europeans—on one side, and Orthodox Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians—the Byzantines—on the other, sowing the seeds of future ethnic animosity and division.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In her travel book, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, author Rebecca West explains that many Westerners who visited the region, “concerned” about the subjugated, puzzlingly ignored the role of the Ottomans in keeping the Balkan Christians at odds with each other. Such Westerners “came back with a pet Balkan people established in their hearts as suffering and innocent, eternally the massacred and never the massacer. [...] The same sort of person, devoted to good works and austerities, who is traditionally supposed to keep a cat and a parrot, often set up on the hearth the image of the Albanian or the Bulgarian or the Serbian or the Macedonian Greek people, which had all the force and blandness of pious fantasy.” Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1944), 19. The role of the selective benefactor that Westerners often assumed in the region was itself an insidious expression of Balkanism. This tendency to pick the righteous among the Balkan nations only deepened local divisions by blaming one (or all but one) of the subjugated peoples instead of the Ottomans for the frequent crises. These lazy philanthropist fantasies caused irreversible damage to the region because they deepened divisions by shading the region in different degrees of “Balkanness.”

<sup>15</sup> A particularly corrosive aspect of this dynamic was the delusional notion that comfort can be found in the knowledge that another’s alleged backwardness is greater than one’s own. Milica Baki -Hayden refers to this dynamic as “nesting orientalism.” Milica Baki -Hayden, “The Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia,” *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995): 917-931.

<sup>16</sup> Discussing Balkanism in literature, author and literary scholar Vesna Goldsworthy explains how this logic of descending Europeanness works: “If the Orthodox Christian peoples of the Balkans are depicted as ‘Eastern’ in relation to Western Europe, they are traditionally portrayed as ‘European’ in comparison to the Islamic world, and described as the upholders of the Christian European identity, *antemurale Christianitatis*, ‘the guardians at the gate’.” Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 8.

Yugoslavism emerged as an anti-imperialist idea—a solution which would free the South Slavs from Ottoman and Habsburg subjugation, and from being at the mercy of the schemes of others who maliciously meddled in Balkan affairs. It started to gain credence with the emergence of the Illyrian Movement in the 1830s—the first cogent attempt at unification of the South Slavs. The Illyrian Movement paved the way towards the formation of Yugoslavia by increasing awareness among the South Slavs of the benefits of formal unification—by arguing that South Slavs can have control of their political environment only if they reject petty nationalisms and enter the European political stage as one.<sup>17</sup> Inspired by German Romantic nationalism, the movement was driven by Croatian intellectuals living under the Habsburg rule, quickly attracting attention from other Habsburg Slavs—Slovenians, and those Serbs living outside of Serbia proper. The “Illyrians” rightly reasoned that the South Slavs are culturally, linguistically and ethnically largely indistinguishable and therefore predisposed to be joined into a single state.<sup>18</sup>

Gradually, many South Slavic politicians, intellectuals, writers, and artists became activists for the Yugoslav cause. Organizations were created which worked on propagating the Yugoslav idea as well as on practical matters which would facilitate the unification efforts.

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<sup>17</sup> The Congress of Berlin is a particularly illustrative instance of the disregard for the Balkan upstarts' ambitions by European powers. The Congress, which took place in June and July of 1878 with the aim of redrawing the administrative borders of the Balkans according to the interests of the Great Powers, put on display the West's paranoia about Russia's military strength and political clout following its victory in the Russo-Turkish War. The British saw the Pan-Slavic movement, which had been gaining in popularity, as integral to an alleged Russian expansionist ploy. True enough, the plight of the fellow Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans did not go unnoticed by the Russians who were sympathetic to it and hoped for closer ties with Slavs in the Balkans. Although the Ottomans' defeat meant the loss of most of their Balkan possessions, the Congress looked for ways to accommodate the Ottomans at the expense of Balkan Christians who desperately wanted to be politically emancipated, free of the Ottoman oppressors, and part of Europe again. As far as the future Yugoslav lands were concerned, Macedonia was given back to the Ottomans, Bosnia and Herzegovina was taken under administration of Austria-Hungary, Serbia, along with Montenegro, finally became fully independent, but both lost some of their territories. For more, see Misha Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War, and the Great Powers, 1804-1999*, Updated ed. (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2012), 136-150.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the logic behind this reasoning, see Andrew Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998), 19-66.



Literary language standardization and creation of a Yugoslav literary canon were priorities as was finding historical commonalities as a way of establishing a joint mythology. These attempts at synthesizing a Yugoslav culture and identity were precursors to unification and they elicited healthy debates regarding whether this new identity should be formed around one that already existed or if it should be an amalgamation of equal parts. Although there were legitimate fears of Serbianization of the future Yugoslav culture (Serbia, having already achieved autonomy and independence, had the potential for imposing its own identity on others), the genuine Yugoslavism prevailed.<sup>19</sup> Writers and artists who shared Yugoslav sentiments often painstakingly incorporated into their work all the potential Yugoslav peoples' cultural motifs as they searched for new themes which, they hoped, would spark enthusiasm for Yugoslavism.<sup>20</sup>

Yugoslavism persisted and in 1915 the Yugoslav Committee was formed in London, consisting of Croats and Serbs from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Committee, which had some financial backing from Serbia, propagated the Yugoslav idea among the South Slavs under the rule of Austria-Hungary, and made efforts to establish connections with those of the same mind in Serbia.<sup>21</sup> It also propagated the idea among the European powers through lobbying, publishing pamphlets, and staging art exhibits with Yugoslav themes. Although the Committee had a somewhat strained relationship with the government of Serbia, the two met in Corfu in 1917 where a declaration was composed which called for unification of the Serbs,

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<sup>19</sup> As John Lampe points out, the Illyrians “discovered that opposition from the Hungarian and Austrian cores of the Habsburg monarchy frustrated them from within, while the existence of an independent Serbia did so from without.” John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 41.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed account of how the future Yugoslav culture was forged early on, see Wachtel, *Making a Nation*, 67-127.

<sup>21</sup> Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 103.

Croats and Slovenes into one kingdom in which each of the three peoples would be free to use their language and alphabet, free to openly identify as members of their ethnic group, free to practice one of the three main religions, Catholicism, Orthodoxy or Islam. Although it did not mention by name many ethnic minorities living in the territory of the future state, the document called for equality of all future Yugoslav citizens.<sup>22</sup> This was the first official act which ratified the validity of the Yugoslav idea and it effectively paved the way for the establishment of the Yugoslav state with the Serbian Karađorđević dynasty as its monarchs. The end of World War I resulted in the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as well as the Ottoman Empire, allowing for the establishment, on December 1, 1918, of the first incarnation of Yugoslavia: The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (colloquially already referred to as Yugoslavia).

Although conceived as a framework within which almost all South Slavs (Bulgarians were the only South Slavic people not included in the new state) would finally be free and equal, the new state immediately faced interethnic strife, establishing a dichotomous political dynamic that would haunt Yugoslavia to its final days. Serbian cultural and political dominance was evident as Serbia, which was formally independent since the Congress of Berlin, brought to the deal a set of functioning state institutions and a developed sense of national consciousness. Having fought on the winning side in World War I—unlike the Croats and Slovenes—the Serbs also developed a sense of entitlement in having majorly contributed to the conditions for the creation of the new state. Some among Croats and Slovenes feared Serbian nationalism and its perceived single-minded drive to bring all Serbs together into one state while giving little regard

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<sup>22</sup> As John Lampe points out, that no mention was made of other ethnic groups was perhaps the chief weakness of the document. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 105

to others' vital national interests.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, some Serbs saw Croats and Slovenes as opportunists who were not genuinely interested in the Yugoslav idea but, finally free of Austria-Hungary, were simply waiting for the right opportunity to leave the new union and form their own separate states. There was a great deal of debate regarding the political, economic, administrative and cultural organization of the new state—the level of centralization, the wisdom of promoting the Yugoslav identity over narrower ethnic identities, the predominant language and alphabet to be used. As established by the St. Vitus Day Constitution, the country became a unitary monarchy—a move whose wisdom was questioned across the political spectrum.<sup>24</sup> While optimism for Yugoslavia grew among the Serbs, others became somewhat alienated from it because of the persistent perception that the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was a state meant to serve the national and political interests of the Serbs first.

After the prominent Croat politician, Stjepan Radić, was assassinated inside the Yugoslav parliament by a Serb politician in June 1928, King Aleksandar—who succeeded his father, King Petar, seven years prior—proclaimed a dictatorship (after abolishing the constitution, and proroguing the parliament). What became known as the January 6 Dictatorship saw the voices of those who opposed unitarization repressed.<sup>25</sup> In the years to follow, Aleksandar renamed the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes into Kingdom of Yugoslavia, divided the country into nine non-ethnically based federal units—*banovinas*—liberalized the economy, and decreed a new constitution, which gave him greater power.<sup>26</sup> Serb and Croat politicians clashed over

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<sup>23</sup> The Congress of Berlin had thwarted Serbia's earlier ambitions to unify with Bosnia and Herzegovina, where many Serbs lived.

<sup>24</sup> For more on the circumstances surrounding the St. Vitus Day Constitution, and the country's transition into a parliamentary kingdom, see Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 125-128.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the January 6 Dictatorship, see Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 163-171.

<sup>26</sup> For more on how the liberal economic approach backfired, see Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 171-173.

volatile issues such as the specifics of the ethnic distribution within the *banovinas*. Both attempted to establish contiguous territories inhabited by their own people.<sup>27</sup> This period saw the establishment of the Ustashe – Croatian Revolutionary Organization (later Movement), which together with the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) worked to destabilize the state. Aleksandar was assassinated in an Ustashe-IMRO plot in Paris in 1934.<sup>28</sup> Because Aleksandar's son Petar was a minor, Aleksandar's cousin Pavle became the regent of Yugoslavia and the acting head of state. The years between the assassination and World War II were full of internal tensions with the schism between the Serbs and Croats widening. In order to appease the Croats who aspired to secede and establish an independent state, a *banovina* was established in 1939 which contained within its borders most of the Croats living in Yugoslavia. Although he was opposed to German expansionism, Pavle signed a neutrality agreement with Hitler in 1941. For this, Pavle was overthrown in a military-led coup d'état and Petar became the king. Just days later, Yugoslavia was invaded by Germany, forcing the young King Petar II and the government into exile in London. The country was quickly conquered and parceled off primarily between Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria with the newly-founded Independent State of Croatia acting as a German satellite state. Yugoslavia's first incarnation ceased to exist.

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<sup>27</sup> Yugoslavism had to contend with Serbian and Croatian notions of how the future state should be organized. This same dynamic destabilized Yugoslavia throughout its existence. As John Lampe points out, "these two ideas for a unitary nation-state were incompatible with each other and with any wider Yugoslav idea. The Serbian and Croatian ideas sought to build on existing, not the 'imagined communities' of European colonial construction described by Benedict Anderson. These ideas were still romantic. They staked out huge territories on the basis of medieval claims to ethnic homelands or historic borders. To support their claims, advocates elaborated on actual traditions, such as commemorating the Serbs' Kosovo battle of 1389. The celebration of these events still fits modern nationalism's use of the past for verification, what Eric Hobsbawm has called 'invented tradition.' Serbian nationalists did so to demonstrate unique suffering during the Ottoman conquest and Croats to show cultural superiority, both wishing to connect their group alone to European civilization. In the process, each claimant began to see or, to paraphrase Benedict Anderson, 'imagine' the other as a historical adversary." Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 40.

<sup>28</sup> For more on the assassination, see Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 173-176.

Out of the ashes of the so-called “old” Yugoslavia emerged a “new” one. It was proclaimed in the small Bosnian city of Jajce on November 29, 1943 under the name of Democratic Federative Yugoslavia, and consisted of six equal units (first states, later republics) rather than one towards which others would gravitate. Tito knew that Yugoslavia’s multiethnic make up could be potentially problematic and promoted “Brotherhood and Unity”—a concept soon to become integral to the Yugoslav Dream—from the beginning.<sup>29</sup> As World War II came to a close, the Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia was declared—an act quickly followed by the King’s abdication and his acceptance of Tito as the leader of Yugoslavia. The Yugoslavism of the “new” Yugoslavia was different from the previous version in that rather than erasing the differences between constituent peoples, the approach was to advocate a supra-national Yugoslav identity which “would overarch and connect the national cultures rather than eliminate them.”<sup>30</sup> This Yugoslav identity evolved over time, but it always elicited varying degrees of commitment by different ethnic groups. Perhaps due to a continued mistrust of the Serbs’ intentions, Croats, Slovenes, and the non-Slavic Albanians remained almost solely committed to their own ethnic corpora.

Building a socialist Yugoslav identity after the interethnic carnage of World War II was a major challenge. The war had an internal dimension which saw members of just about all ethnic groups fight each other in one uniform or another and under the guise of one ideology or another—an unfortunate fact that never stopped destabilizing Yugoslavia.<sup>31</sup> A German puppet state, the NDH staged a genocidal campaign in World War II and exterminated many of the

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<sup>29</sup> It was important that the new start happen in the multiethnic, and therefore symbolically neutral, Bosnia and Herzegovina rather than in Serbia or Croatia.

<sup>30</sup> Wachtel, *Making a Nation*, 131.

<sup>31</sup> For more on Yugoslavia in World War II, see Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 201-232.

Serbs living in its territories. There were two resistance movements against the Nazi occupation in Yugoslavia during World War II: the predominantly Serbian anti-communist Chetnik Movement, loyal to King Petar II and to the government in exile, under the leadership of Draža Mihajlović, and the multiethnic, though heavily Serb, Partisans organized by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and led by Tito. The Partisans waged a successful guerilla war against the German Nazis, Serbian Chetniks, Italian Fascists, Croat Ustashe (which included Bosnian Muslims), Albanian Ballists, and others.<sup>32</sup> The memory of World War II in Yugoslavia was a convoluted mess of contradictory perceptions of freedom fighters and aggressors, proud heroes and cowering enemy collaborators, trauma of genocide and stigma of being “genocidal”—with all labels applied to all ethnicities to some degree. Tito’s Partisans, however, were unqualified moral and actual winners who, “having fought or resisted the enemy on native soil [...] developed great pride in the state which emerged from their sacrifices.”<sup>33</sup> Yugoslav authorities had to carefully balance the sense of entitlement and expectations of privilege by those who fought in the Partisan forces with the burden of the stigma attached to enemy collaborators.

Following the war, Yugoslavia gradually made progress towards another essential aspect of the Yugoslav Dream: making the workers owners of firms that employ them, and in charge of all matters pertaining to production. Yugoslavia had a Soviet-style centrally planned economy until the 1950s when it adopted a more market oriented and less bureaucratic approach. The management of state companies was, at least on paper if not entirely in practice, given to the workers. Workers made contributions toward the budget; wages partly depended on the

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<sup>32</sup> Although they initially supported the royalist Chetniks, the Allies eventually realized that, although ideologically “problematic,” Tito’s Partisans were a more consolidated force whose guerilla tactics were very effective in the fight against the Nazis.

<sup>33</sup> Sharon Zukin, *Beyond Marx and Tito: Theory and Practice in Yugoslav Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 86.

performance in the market and were distributed according to workers' desires. Capital assets ceased to be the property of the state and became the ownership of the enterprises (and, in theory, of their workers).<sup>34</sup> Yugoslavia moved towards market socialism in the 1960s when more reforms were implemented. The country began opening up to the Western economies, and further decentralized both politically and economically by giving more power to the republics as well as to businesses. Businesses were encouraged to self-finance; state subsidies were reduced; profit distribution was managed within individual enterprises with less oversight. Symptomatic of difficulties involving balancing socialism and market economy, banks became powerful institutions in Yugoslavia, in charge of almost all of investment (formerly the domain of the state through its investment funds). Perhaps most egregiously, the managerial technocratic strata came to possess a great deal of power while the workers became alienated from the process of running the businesses.<sup>35</sup>

More change followed with constitutional reforms of 1971, which aimed to "establish the supremacy of the self-management doctrine over that of state socialism."<sup>36</sup> Yugoslavia's balancing act, however, remained precarious. Gradually, the state lost jurisdiction over economic development and it had no funds to invest anyway as they had been transferred to the banks. In effect, "republics and autonomous provinces were made responsible for their own economic development."<sup>37</sup> Regional differences were amplified—parts of the country better equipped to

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<sup>34</sup> For more details, see Paul Phillips and Bogomil Ferfila, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Way: Yugoslavia 1945-1991* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1992), 35-41.

<sup>35</sup> The changes can be seen as in alignment with the socialist doctrine of reducing the state bureaucratic apparatus, but they also resulted in poor economic performance, the creation of a specialized managerial class, and reduction of input from the workers into how businesses were run.

<sup>36</sup> Phillips and Ferfila, *The Rise and Fall*, 43.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

transition into new modes of economic development saw an increase in the living standards; poorer regions could only watch in resentment and hope to rise to that level one day. The 1974 Constitution fully implemented the worker self-management system. Workers were organized into units of “associated labour [...] aimed at bringing management of both labour and the means of production (social capital) under the direct control of the workers.”<sup>38</sup> The logic of the market, however, threatened equality and unions had to aggressively deal with the problem.<sup>39</sup> Social property came to belong to “each and every citizen of Yugoslavia.”<sup>40</sup> The political and economic system were redesigned to give agency to units of citizen organization at grass roots level—to democratize the society—giving as much power as possible to the working class. This was “direct democracy,” but it was rife with problems as, arguably, Yugoslavia was not equipped to handle such “radical reform.”<sup>41</sup> As opportunistic politicians (at all levels) continued to work hard on perpetuating the myth of their own indispensability as the overseers of production, the economy declined, and waves of dissatisfaction, apathy and resentment swept the country. European Economic Community’s protectionism stifled trade with Western Europe and although the economic downturn that followed was partly a result of the global economic turmoil, “the real measure of the emerging crisis was the decline of labour productivity.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Phillips and Ferfila, *The Rise and Fall*, 46.

<sup>39</sup> Especially, the income inequality “between workers in the production sphere” and workers in “public services,” which became a problem because those “in the production sphere derived income from the economically determined market, [and] those in public services from politically determined budgets.” *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>42</sup> For more, see Phillips and Ferfila, *The Rise and Fall*, 50-56



In the 1970s, Yugoslavia began to experience the first serious effects of the global economic crisis. Yugoslavia's "borrowing binge sustained the rapid growth of the economy through the 1970s," but inflation and cost of living rose as the 1980s crisis loomed.<sup>43</sup> The crisis was severely exacerbated by the country's inability to repay the high-interest loans from the IMF on whose insistence Yugoslavia implemented strict austerity measures. It became obvious that Yugoslavia had not, after all, escaped outside meddling in its affairs. It was not a coincidence that the 1970s saw the commitment to Yugoslavism severely tested. As the inflation set in, regional disparity in economic development became glaring and a source of resentment and rivalry.<sup>44</sup> Hawkish politicians on almost all sides played up ethnic animosities and eroded one of the fundamentals of the Yugoslav Dream: "Brotherhood and Unity." As the heroic myths of the Partisan struggle of World War II faded into irrelevance, narrow nationalist interests prevailed. The anti-reform forces of unitarization and those of decentralization and liberalization clashed. Croats and Slovenes ostensibly wanted economic and political decentralization. Their often openly nationalist rhetoric, however, seemed to be aimed not just at Serbian politicians who were against further reforms but at Serbs in general. Serbia had its own "liberals" who wanted a more market-oriented economy and a toning down of Serbia's own nationalist rhetoric. Tito's death in 1980 shook up the Yugoslav society to its core and seemed a fitting conclusion to the last decade in which Yugoslavia experienced any semblance of stability. The ethnic divisions became deeper in the 1980s as Yugoslav peoples became increasingly obsessed with historical injustices and

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<sup>43</sup> Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 322.

<sup>44</sup> This statistic alone illustrates the scale of disparity: "In the late 1980s, Slovenia's per capita social product was over seven times that of Kosovo's; over triple that of Macedonia or Bosnia; and more than double that of Serbia." Phillips and Ferfila, *The Rise and Fall*, 86.

traumas; the economy remained in shambles, unemployment on the rise, corruption, and abuses of power rampant. As the 1980s progressed, there seemed to be little left of Yugoslavia.

In retrospect, it seems clear that the economic crisis and the reduction in standard of living meant the end of Yugoslavia. Yugoslav Dream was firmly affixed to the country's consumer culture, and the almost Western lifestyles that Yugoslav economy provided for a time. Arguably, the government went on a "borrowing binge" and encouraged rampant consumerism to validate itself—in order to create the illusion of being able to provide what other socialist governments could not. Yugoslavs traveled, built weekend homes in the mountains or on the Adriatic coast, indulged in goods imported from the West, followed the latest global trends in music, cinema, and fashion. Although Yugoslavia was not exactly class-free, these perks spread across the spectrum of the society, and were available to most. To spend a week or two on the Adriatic coast every summer was not a privilege but the right of every working class family.<sup>45</sup> Yugoslavs' ability to afford Western goods, better housing and health care, spend disposable income on travel (freely, with hardly any restrictions), and on items considered luxuries

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<sup>45</sup> For more on the culture of working class tourism in Yugoslavia, see Igor Duda, "Workers into Tourists: Entitlements, Desires, and the Realities," in *Yugoslavia's Sunny Side: A History of Tourism in Socialism (1950s-1980s)*, eds. Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 33-68. This, at least in the eyes of the Yugoslavs, made their brand of socialism special "precisely because it did not fit easily into the socialist matrix of industry." Karin Taylor and Hannes Grandits, "Tourism and the Making of Socialist Yugoslavia," in *Yugoslavia's Sunny Side: A History of Tourism in Socialism (1950s-1980s)*, eds. Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 11. Shopping trips across the border, especially to Italy, Austria, Greece and Turkey, were common. Yugoslavs could enter many Western countries without a visa because they were unlikely to seek political or economic asylum there. In that sense, the Yugoslav passport was a major part of the Yugoslav identity—and sense of "exceptionalism"—precisely because the citizens of other communist countries could not freely travel. For more on the cross-border shopping culture, see Maja Mikula, "Highways of Desire: Cross-Border Shopping Trips in Former Yugoslavia, 1960s-1980s," in *Yugoslavia's Sunny Side: A History of Tourism in Socialism (1950s-1980s)*, eds. Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 210-237. Yet, tourism inevitably put on display Yugoslavia's class differences. Those who were better off (the managerial class, and even those working in "public services" rather than in "production sphere") often spent their holidays in destinations outside of the country. This pattern made it apparent that Yugoslav "socialism had produced social strata with notable differences in income, education, occupation, and levels of social security and lifestyle." Taylor and Grandits, "Tourism and the Making of Socialist Yugoslavia," 18.

elsewhere in the communist world, was what made Yugoslavs different (at least in our imaginations) from the Poles, Romanians, or Bulgarians.

Yugoslavia was different from other European socialist countries in another respect: it had a multiethnic society with a history of ethnic discord. As historians Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor observe, Yugoslav government seemed to understand that ethnic harmony could be maintained “through the peaceful coexistence of contended workers relaxing at the beach. Holidays and tourism could be utilized to create a new Yugoslav awareness among the population and thus transcend the national, political, and religious enmities so viciously played out during the Second World War.”<sup>46</sup> As historian Patrick Patterson only somewhat flippantly notes, this rampant Western-style consumerism and comfortable lifestyles—distinct features of the joint state rather than of Croatia, Slovenia, or Macedonia—may have been precisely what kept Yugoslavia’s multi-ethnic fabric together: “Yugoslavia’s remarkable culture of consumption [...] the shared celebration and pursuit of abundance was what made the venture, at least for a time, so successful.”<sup>47</sup> Yugoslav identity came to be defined by that “abundance”—the unique balance of socialism and Western consumer culture. Journalist and novelist Slavenka Drakuli points out:

I have to admit that for me, as for many of my friends born after World War II, being Croat has no special meaning. Not only was I educated to believe that the whole territory of Yugoslavia was my homeland, but because we could travel freely abroad (which people of the Eastern-bloc countries couldn’t), I almost believed that borders, as well as nationalities, existed only in people’s heads. Moreover, the youth culture of 1968 brought us even closer to the world through rock music, demonstrations, movies, books and the

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<sup>46</sup> Taylor and Grandits, “Tourism and the Making of Socialist Yugoslavia,” 6.

<sup>47</sup> Patrick Hyder Patterson, *Bought and Sold: Living and Losing the Good Life in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), xvii. Patterson’s book provides an in-depth account of various aspects of Yugoslavia’s consumer culture.

English language. We had so much in common with the West that in fact we mentally belonged there.<sup>48</sup>

Once the country entered a serious economic crisis, and the “abundance” was gone—Yugoslavia started to drift away from both socialism and from Western Europe—the borders reappeared and the country unraveled along ethnic lines. Soon, as the last of the Yugoslav Dream died, Yugoslavia’s second incarnation, too, ceased to exist.

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<sup>48</sup> Slavenka Drakuli , *The Balkan Express: Fragments from the Other Side of War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1993), 50.

## Chapter 1

### Black Waves on Red Shores: A New Yugoslav Cinema for a New Yugoslavia

In our country, only a democracy which continually makes progress can clarify class conflicts and diminish class differences.

— Milovan Djilas, *Anatomy of a Moral*

#### Out of the *New* and Into the *Black*

The most politically engaged tradition in the Yugoslav cinema of the 1960s is found in the *Black Wave*. This bleakly pessimistic tendency in Yugoslav cinema emerged primarily in Serbia, but a handful of filmmakers from Croatia as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina made films that fall into the category. Several interrelated developments in the social, political and intellectual life in Yugoslavia are typically associated with the *Black Wave*: democratic deficit, especially the difficulties associated with practical application of the workers' self-management system which was meant to guarantee a functional participatory democracy for workers at all levels, the emergence and entrenchment of the New Class, the 1968 student demonstrations which voiced objections to the abuses of power by the New Class elites who were rendering the post-war generation both politically and economically perspectiveless, and the activities of the *Praxis School* philosophers who called for a thorough democratization of the Yugoslav society. *Black Wave* commented on, and indeed documented, Yugoslavia's decline: the failure of the workers' self-management system, the mismanagement of the economy by petty bureaucrats, and the attendant unemployment and housing crises, the emergence of class division, and post-war generations' disillusionment with Yugoslavia, especially the perception that the country was becoming less democratic. In the decade or so (roughly from 1963 to 1973) during which they were active, *Black Wave* filmmakers offered astute assessments of life in the socialist Yugoslavia and their output forms an extraordinary outburst of socially aware and fearlessly political

filmmaking. *Black Wave* was political activism through cinema. The films routinely alluded to the erosion of participatory democracy and suggested that Yugoslav Dream was but an illusion for most citizens. *Black Wave* introduced into the public sphere those concerns which could generally not be openly voiced in the political arena and so transgressed the boundaries of the politically acceptable in the 1960s Yugoslavia.<sup>49</sup> Deemed a dangerous ideological challenge, *Black Wave* was gradually suppressed by the Yugoslav government.

*Black Wave* had a philosophical equivalent in the *Praxis School*. Praxis philosophers tried to steer Yugoslavia away from dogmatic interpretations of Marxism, unfaithful to the spirit of the theory; they offered a constructive ideological critique of the Yugoslav system, especially of the unacknowledged class division and of the rampant alienation of the workers; they asked for a reconceptualization of the Yugoslav socialism rooted in authentic Marxist humanism.<sup>50</sup> Praxis

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<sup>49</sup> I want to clarify here that *Black Wave* films were not necessarily anti-communist. The filmmakers did not pine for Western “freedoms” but rather denounced erosion of democracy under the management of the anti-intellectual, conservative, self-glorifying war generation. That they were able to make films critical of the system and did not idealize the West, were both likely due to the fact that *Black Wave* emerged “in the era of ‘mature Titoism,’ a time when the Yugoslav model was more open, more successful and more communicative than other state models of socialism.” Dominika Prejdová, “People from the Fringes of Society are the *Spiritus Movens* of Life in the Balkans: An Interview with Želimir Žilnik,” in *Želimir Žilnik: For an Idea—Against Status Quo*, ed. Branislav Dimitrijević (Novi Sad: Playground Produkcija, 2009), 207. For more on the thematic concerns of the *Black Wave*, see Greg DeCuir, *Yugoslav Black Wave: Polemical Cinema from 1963-72 in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Film Center Serbia, 2011).

<sup>50</sup> Praxis philosophers denounced the Soviet system because it enabled the state rule over the proletariat (when it should have been the other way around), and because the transfer of private property to the state gave rise to a huge bureaucracy. In fairness, to criticize the Soviets was politically safe, but they also harshly criticized the Yugoslav system and its leadership. As one of its most prominent members, Mihailo Marković, points out, by the early 1960s “Praxis philosophers established that both forms of economic and political alienation still existed in Yugoslav society, that the working class was still exploited—this time by the new elites: bureaucracy and technocracy; that the market economy will inevitably reproduce capital-labor relations; that self-management exists only at the micro-level in enterprises and local communities and organizations, and that consequently its further development requires a gradual withering away of professional politics and the formation of workers’ councils at the regional, republican, and federal level; that the basic precondition for a really participatory democracy was at first a radical democratization and, later, the withering away, of the Party.” Mihailo Marković, “Marxist Philosophy in Yugoslavia: The Praxis Group,” in Mihailo Marković and Robert S. Cohen, *Yugoslavia: The Rise and Fall of Socialist Humanism* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1975), 26. Tolerated for over a decade, the *Praxis School* was suppressed in the early 1970s, after Yugoslavia underwent a crisis borne out of the push for greater decentralization by both Serbian and Croat politicians—something that, especially in the case of the latter, Yugoslav authorities perceived as driven by nationalism (and as an attempt to break up the country). The authorities cracked down on the

philosophers argued for a true participatory democracy as opposed to an illusion of one. They supported “workers’ self-management as the sole form of social organization capable of resolving the contradictions inherent in both bourgeois and existing socialist societies and as most consonant with Marx’s vision of a ‘free association of producers.’”<sup>51</sup> They, however, also asserted that “without a frank, critical, Marxist evaluation—whatever its conclusions—of the practice of self-management in Yugoslavia, this revolutionary principle of social organization would represent nothing more than an empty ideological justification for a new system of class oppression.”<sup>52</sup> In this they echoed the sentiments expressed in 1957 by Milovan Djilas who suggested that a political bureaucracy he termed the New Class had emerged which regarded political power as capital property—as the means to gain financially. This New Class managed state property, and regulated wages, economic development, and even sports and culture. As any ruling class would, it shamelessly went about trying to convince everyone “that the establishment of its power would result in happiness and freedom for all men.”<sup>53</sup> Like Djilas and the *Praxis School*, *Black Wave* films suggested that Yugoslav democracy, especially its flagship feature, the self-management system, amounts to little more than an illusion. In *Black Wave* films, those who believe in the fairness of the system and play by the rules, end up at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The films tended to focus on outsiders and losers—those who were not experiencing the prosperity integral to the Yugoslav Dream—and, in turn, hinted that Yugoslavia was a class-based society. The films expose “the depravity of the working and peasant classes, who socialist

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*Praxis School* philosophers, closing their journals and removing many from their university posts, until the movement completely dissipated in the mid-1970s.

<sup>51</sup> Gerson S. Sher, *Praxis: Marxist Criticism and Dissent in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 157.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>53</sup> Milovan Djilas, *The New Class* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957), 38.

ideologues, at least in their proclamations, designated as embodiments of progressive values and agents of social transformation, all the while doing nothing to improve their working and living conditions.”<sup>54</sup>

*Black Wave* also mirrored and paralleled the dissenting voices of the student demonstrations of 1968. Both pointed to a generational divide in which the post-war generation, eager for change, was pitted against the conservative and immutable war generation. Yugoslav authorities laid part of the blame on the *Praxis School* philosophers when in June of 1968, the capital of Yugoslavia was hit by street and university campus demonstrations during which thousands of students demanded changes. Economic reforms implemented in the mid-1960s caused unemployment rates to grow rapidly—a development “remedied” by the state via agreements relaxing travel and employment restrictions with Western countries like Germany, allowing Yugoslavs to look for work outside of the country.<sup>55</sup> Since employment was guaranteed by the constitution, the students pointed the finger at those running the country as the source of the problem. The economic crisis brought about a political one. The students took over the University of Belgrade and christened it “The Red University of Karl Marx.” They frequently clashed with the police on the streets of Belgrade while chanting slogans against the “Red Bourgeoisie” that was mismanaging the country. The chaos on the streets of Belgrade lasted seven days until Tito addressed the students on TV, promised changes and suggested that not even he is beyond reproach.

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<sup>54</sup> Tatjana Aleksi , *The Sacrificed Body: Balkan Community Building and the Fear of Freedom* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 113.

<sup>55</sup> For details, see William Zimmerman, *Open Borders, Nonalignment, and the Political Evolution of Yugoslavia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 76.



Although Yugoslav artists were to create works supportive of socialism, the government lacked a cohesive policy towards dissenting voices such as those of *Black Wave* filmmakers who offered a bleak view of the Yugoslav reality.<sup>56</sup> Student demonstrations shook up the country's political establishment and helped put all forms of dissent, including in the arts, under scrutiny. The crackdown on the forces of decentralization among the "liberals" within the republican leaderships of Serbia and Croatia also created a climate that led to the eventual suppression of *Black Wave* in the early 1970s, with many films scrutinized by the censors and unofficially banned, and directors of controversial films ostracized both socially and professionally.<sup>57</sup> If a

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<sup>56</sup> The break with Stalin resulted in a relaxation of the rules guiding cinema. It was understood, however, though nowhere explicitly defined that Tito, self-management, World War II, and the Army were topics to be handled with extreme caution. To depict the social and political reality of Yugoslavia in negative terms was enough for a film to come under scrutiny and criticism, but even the most "problematic" films were usually screened at least once.

<sup>57</sup> Director Želimir Žilnik suggests, perhaps somewhat overstating the severity of the methods and of the consequences of suppression of *Black Wave* films: "In our present circumstances it is almost impossible to understand the scope and gravity of that ideological campaign. The entire party, state and police, around ten thousand people, were engaged in excluding, persecuting, 'criticising' and disabling those people who were stigmatised as 'ideological enemies'. Under state socialism, such a form of exorcism was a very important tool of 'discipline.' It is interesting to note that in Yugoslavia, which had in any case a more open system, an undefined policy of self-management and free travelling abroad, the Party did not exclude the campaigns and 'cleansing' agendas typical of Stalinist models. The destruction of the New Wave and the change of its name to Black Wave is an obvious example of an wide-ranging, effective and self-destructive course of action. The most creative phase of our domestic cinema was brought to a standstill. Directors like Makavejev, Petrović, Pavlović and many others were not given new projects. Because of his film *Plastic Jesus*, Lazar Stojanović was sentenced to two years in prison. They banned all my films that had been made until then: five documentaries and *Early Works*. And my film *Freedom or Cartoons*, which was in the editing process, was also banned. I remember the social security office sending me a notice that since my films were not shown publicly I was to be stripped off the status of a filmmaker—which was the basis for my insurance. So, you see, they were successful administrative measures. When the most interesting, internationally acclaimed auteurs went abroad, their cinema language deteriorated and they practically never again made films of the quality they used to. I was still young then, not yet thirty, and I decided: I'm not going to let those parasites break me." Prejdová, "People from the Fringes of Society," 208. Yet, only one *Black Wave* film, the omnibus, *The City* (Rakonjac/Pavlović/Babac, 1963), was ever officially banned (it was, in fact, the *only* Yugoslav film ever banned). Paradoxically, *The City* was far less daring than some of the films to come later, suggesting a great deal of confusion existed as to just what type of subject matter was off limits. For more on *The City* and its ban, see Bogdan Tirnanić, *Crni Talas* (Belgrade: Filmski centar Srbije, 2008), 30-48. It is worth noting that, as film scholar David Cook points out, the "counteroffensive [against *Black Wave*] was led by centrists rather than reactionaries," and was not nearly as harsh as the one led against the Czech New Wave filmmakers around the same time. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film*, 750. Curiously, the actors who appeared in *Black Wave* films seemed to suffer no consequences for their participation, and their careers often involved appearances in establishment-friendly films—sometimes simultaneously with the "problematic" ones.

filmmaker did not heed the “advice” to self-censor and alter the film, it would typically be screened once (so as to eliminate the perception of there being a ban) and then disappear from circulation.<sup>58</sup> Some of the more radical *Black Wave* filmmakers, the “anarcho-liberals” as they were termed were dealt with somewhat more methodically and more harshly.<sup>59</sup> Some were pressured into taking a break from filmmaking while others left the country. The term *Black Wave* took hold, having been first applied in a 1969 article in Belgrade newspaper, *Borba*, which described the films as aberrations that stood separately from the rest of society and as borderline criminal imitations of Western trends, especially in their emphasis on themes of alienation. The crackdown prompted public debates and polemics about the responsibility and value of engagement of artists in social and political sphere, with some arguing for complete artistic freedom of filmmakers who had a duty to point out the negative, while others decried what they deemed a reactionary collision of *Black Wave* with socialist values.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Several *Black Wave* filmmakers recall with irony that although producers would sometimes ask for films to be reedited in order for the offensive content to be removed or, alternatively, distributors were advised to not handle problematic films, it was film professionals themselves who effectively censored the films. Like all workers, film professionals self-managed and discussed their “products” in workers’ council meetings, during which they applied self-critique, a process rarely taken seriously by those involved. They also formed censorship boards, which typically consisted of renowned artists, filmmakers and otherwise, whose discussions of problematic films were, in theory if not always in practice, a matter of public record. Just how informal and loose this system was is suggested by anecdotes involving films coming under scrutiny only after receiving negative comments from functionaries who had seen them, causing their subordinates to remove the films from circulation in order to please their bosses. *Zabranjeni bez zabrane*, directed by Tucakovi and Nikodijevi, 2007.

<sup>59</sup> Director Lazar Stojanovi is one of those who paid a rather high price for their dissent despite the “confusion,” most likely because the film’s release coincided with the peak in the activities of the “liberals.” Not only was his 1971 film, *Plastic Jesus*, unofficially banned but Stojanovi was imprisoned on an “unrelated” charge for three years. He recounts how easily he came across the raw footage of Tito’s speech which dealt with 1968 student demonstrations, and which included the Yugoslav leader appearing rather uncomfortable and confused. That Stojanovi used the footage—the main reason why the film got scrutinized and its director imprisoned—is unsurprising but that he obtained it so easily does suggest a rather lax attitude towards possible sources of embarrassment for even the most sacred Yugoslav public figure. *Zabranjeni bez zabrane*, directed by Tucakovi and Nikodijevi, 2007.

<sup>60</sup> The *Borba* article elicited a fierce response from director Aleksandar Petrovi (whose films were not even particularly controversial). For details, see Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 72. For the *Borba* article and for insight into the ideological debates that followed, see Aleksandar Petrovi, *Novi Film II (1965-1970: Crni Film)* (Belgrade: Nau na knjiga, 1988), 271-354. For a brief overview of the suppression of *Black Wave* and of the ideological debates about the role of the film artist in Yugoslavia, see Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 78-83.

## The Many Shades of Black

Writing in 1957, Milovan Djilas points out some hard truths about the Yugoslav system: although the state was meant to wither away and democracy to flourish, the “reverse happened”; the promise that the standard of living would go up and “the differences between cities and villages, between intellectual and physical labor, would slowly disappear” has been betrayed as the “differences have increased,” and “the standard of living had failed to rise in proportion to the rate of industrialization”<sup>61</sup> *Black Wave* films routinely called attention to this disconnect between the promises of a democratic and prosperous society, free of class divisions and all forms of exploitation, and the reality that Yugoslavia had ceased to progress towards communism and was now ruled by a class of bureaucrats with no intention of relinquishing their control of the country to the people. In this chapter, I discuss four *Black Wave* films, Živojin Pavlović’s *When I am Dead and Gone* (1967) and *Ambush* (1969), and *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (Makavejev, 1971) and *Early Works* (Žilnik, 1969) which all suggested that the country’s rulers were not authentic communists but only masqueraded as such. These four films not only pointed to this performativity of the elites, but reflected back into the public sphere the disillusionment of the citizens and so displaced the official representations of Yugoslav reality. My intent in analyzing the films is not to deride Yugoslavia’s socialist system but to examine how the Yugoslav society of the 1960s was seen by its more political filmmakers. While considering the aesthetic and narrative strategies used by these four films, I also identify developments in the Yugoslav social and political life that directly correspond to the films’ critiques. By virtue of attempting to show the ugly truths about the Yugoslav society, downplayed by the political establishment, the four films warrant consideration from a single

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<sup>61</sup> Djilas, *The New Class*, 37.

point of view, that of the revelatory capability of their depictions of the Yugoslav society. My analysis is therefore loosely structured around different traditions and strategies of realism employed by the films and utilizes critical tools and discourses pertaining to the ability of cinema to not only mirror reality but to evoke intellectual and visceral responses of the audiences to their social and political environment.

In both *When I'm Dead and Gone* and *Ambush*, Pavlovi depicts a cutthroat environment, full of filth and poverty, and populated with uncouth, manipulative, malicious, rapacious characters with unrestrained appetites for corruption, violence and sex. Pavlovi's unsentimental albeit minimally dramatized frankness alone qualifies as naturalism in the literary tradition of Émile Zola. Pavlovi's forsaken "heroes," however, are not mere witnesses to human misery caused by some vaguely defined universal failing of human nature. Though Pavlovi's naïve, childlike characters seem doomed from the start, unable to successfully manage their conflicts with their environments, their tragic fates and, in turn, Pavlovi's fatalism have concrete roots and causes in the society's social and political upheavals. Pavlovi's approach can therefore be more precisely described as being in the literary realist tradition championed by Georg Lukács which depicts individuals caught in the historically specific circumstances and whose experiences provide a picture of the totality of their social and political environment.<sup>62</sup>

Pavlovi's characters' subjective experiences put into focus the objective reality: the state mechanisms which have led to hardships of both the characters and of the viewers.

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<sup>62</sup> See Georg Lukács, "Realism in the Balance," in Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics* (1977; repr., London: Verso, 2007), 28-59. Lukács is, of course, discussing the capitalist context in which literary realism illuminates the conditions produced by capitalism and therefore possesses revolutionary potential to overturn capitalism. Pavlovi is working within a society arrested in a revolutionary transition, and alerts the viewer to the conditions that transition has spawned, and to precisely why the society's progress towards communism has been stunted.

Makavejev's and Žilnik's approaches in *WR* and *Early Works* respectively can be broadly described as cinematic equivalents of Brechtian modernism which puts into focus the "constructedness" of the films themselves; rather than being eased into an illusion of reality inherent to the cinematic medium, the audience is reminded that the medium cannot but disseminate ideology. In the tradition of Brecht's Epic Theatre "innovations," *WR* and *Early Works* dispense with conventional drama entirely, reject cause-effect logic and instead rely heavily on montage; they offer a fragmented viewer experience through discontinuity editing and jumbled chronology, and have the characters directly address the audience and pose questions to be pondered.<sup>63</sup> Like Brecht's Epic Theatre, Makavejev's and Žilnik's avant-garde experimentation disrupts traditional realism. It keeps the audience at arm's length by rejecting naturalistic acting, by rejecting authenticity that corresponds to real life situations and thus inhibiting psychological realism, spectator identification, and, in turn, emotional involvement. The characters tend to stand for a particular social class and its attendant problems and serve to identify those problems to the viewer so they can be considered and analyzed. The strategies employed by Makavejev and Žilnik, however, are not anti-realist but rather, like Brecht's Epic Theatre, aim to broaden the concept of realism to include direct interventions into the political sphere—they employ dialectical maneuvering that engages with iconography and mythology of the dominant ideology and aims to make the spectator aware of precisely how the elites have mismanaged the country.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> For more on the "innovations," see Bertolt Brecht, "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre," in *Brecht On Theatre: the Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. John Willett (1964; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 37.

<sup>64</sup> For Brecht, realism meant "laying bare society's causal network/showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators/writing from the standpoint of the class which has prepared the broadest solutions for the most pressing problems afflicting human society/emphasizing the dynamics of development/concrete and so as to encourage abstraction." Bertolt Brecht, "The Popular and the Realistic," in *Brecht On Theatre: the Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. John Willett (1964; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 109.

Živojin Pavlović suggested that *Black Wave* “doesn’t intend to sparkle, but to torture. It doesn’t want to seduce, but rather to burden our ethical, political and state conformism, by impertinently portraying the fate of its heroes.”<sup>65</sup> *When I’m Dead and Gone* does not romanticize non-conformism, but neither does it focus on the dreary details of life in the gutter. Instead, it directly points to unemployment—caused by economic reforms—as the source of Jimmy’s misery. As the expert on Balkan affairs Susan Woodward points out, because the Yugoslav society was built “around the concept of community through labor” and therefore “[t]o be unemployed was to be excluded from full membership in society—a loss of full citizenship rights, a second-class status, a disenfranchisement.”<sup>66</sup> Paradoxically, Jimmy’s unemployment implies both freedom and inequality. Jimmy’s predicament seems a perfect manifestation of Erich Fromm’s distinction between “freedom from”—being free from external societal structures, conventions, restrictions and bonds of authority—and “freedom to”—being able to spontaneously pursue drives (sex, creative), to fulfill one’s intellectual potential, and to connect with others.<sup>67</sup> Jimmy is not a slave to the state and its institutions, but that “negative” freedom comes at a price—inability to participate in the political life, stigmatization and eventual physical

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<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Kirn, Sekulić and Testen, “Prologue,” *Surfing the Black*, 5.

<sup>66</sup> Susan L. Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment: the Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945-1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 4.

<sup>67</sup> Fromm says of spontaneity: “Spontaneous activity is the one way in which man can overcome the terror of aloneness without sacrificing the integrity of his self; for in the spontaneous realization of the self, man unites himself anew with the world—with man, nature, and himself. Love is the foremost component of such spontaneity; not love as the dissolution of the self in another person, not love as the possession of another person, but love as spontaneous affirmation of others, as the union of the individual self. The dynamic quality of love lies in this very polarity: that it springs from the need of overcoming separateness, that it leads to oneness—and yet that individuality is not eliminated. Work is the other component; not work as a compulsive activity in order to escape aloneness, not work as a relationship to nature which is partly one of dominating her, partly one of worship of and enslavement by the very products of man’s hands, but work as creation in which man becomes one with nature in the act of creation. What holds true of love and work holds true of all spontaneous action, whether it be the realization of sensuous pleasure or participation in the political life of the community. It affirms the individuality of the self and at the same time it unites the self with man and nature. The basic dichotomy that is inherent in freedom—the birth of individuality and the pain of aloneness—is dissolved on a higher plane by man’s spontaneous action.” Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Avon Books, 1965), 287.

removal from the society. Jimmy never finds affirmation via “positive” freedom either because it, too, has become a state institution. Jimmy cannot find fulfillment in another’s love because in the Yugoslavia of *Dead and Gone*, love is not given freely but only calculatedly—mainly in exchange for financial security which only comes with employment. Jimmy cannot express his individuality through creative work either because singing, too, has become a profession—rather than a spontaneous form of expression—that caters to youth tastes, requires managers, promotion, and a real talent.

Fromm suggests that “freedom from” in a society that has liberated itself from authoritarian rule typically leads to another form of authoritarianism—and another set of repressive institutions—precisely because this “negative” freedom is insufficient when it is not accompanied by freedom of expression and individual liberty. Ultimately, the majority (the middle class) finds “refuge” in being repressed yet again while maintaining a myth of liberty. Like *Dead and Gone*, *Ambush* suggests that Yugoslavs are alienated both from each other and from their state institutions. Like Jimmy, Ive of *Ambush* finds the limits of freedom when he speaks out without reservations against moral and ideological corruption. Although he believes in state institutions, like Jimmy, Ive stands in opposition to them because they do not allow pursuit of “positive” freedom, they cannot be transcended and force Ive into a life of loneliness and marginality. Ideological barriers do not allow Ive to find love; rather than being allowed to go back to school now that the war is almost over, Ive is recruited to hunt down enemies of the state. Ive cannot integrate into the society because his kind and docile nature is out of place in the system in which mob hysteria is disguised as justice and cold-blooded pursuit of economic interests stands for prosperity. Dismayed by the opportunism of witch-hunts targeting “enemy collaborators” and by the mythmaking that accompanies them, Ive realizes that he is not free. He

is promptly removed from the society because he is an obstacle to proliferation of official mythology which falsely claims to guarantee “positive” freedom for all citizens.

Like *Dead and Gone* and *Ambush*, Makavejev’s *WR* suggests that Yugoslavia is a repressive society that craves repression by ideologues who hide behind cynical dogma that champions both “positive” and “negative” freedom. As Bogdan Tirnani suggests, *WR* “is a work that speaks about why the suppression of free thought is also a suppression of free love, and vice versa, but also, within the same tendency, about the degree to which the liberation of the suppressed Eros can and must be the necessary precondition of any real spiritual liberation.”<sup>68</sup> Makavejev mocks such myths by depicting communist leaders as sexually repressed psychopaths, but ultimately asks the same question as Pavlovi : Have socialist revolutions been arrested in convulsive transitional moments where freedom is an illusion and communism forever remains within reach but unattainable? If Pavlovi ’s approach can be described as Lukácsian realism (more general picture of the political environment depicted, offering a view of the totality of social conditions), Makavejev’s is certainly Brechtian (specific insight into the mechanisms of oppression via articulation of the contradictions of the system).<sup>69</sup> Although often too cynical in tone to be taken didactically, *WR* engages the spectators in a refashioning of their political environment. As film scholar Pavle Levi suggests, Makavejev “conceives of the viewer of his films as precisely that individual whose complete freedom he is advocating.”<sup>70</sup> Makavejev employs Eisensteinian montage in order to offer a highly formalized dialectical insight into that

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<sup>68</sup> Tirnani , *Crni Talas*, 115. (translation mine)

<sup>69</sup> For a comparison of Lukács’ and Brecht’s approaches to realism, see Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: an Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 75-90.

<sup>70</sup> Pavle Levi, *Disintegration in Frames: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Cinema* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 31.



environment. Because it breaks spatial and temporal continuity, and uses symbolic imagery extraneous to the environment depicted, this approach can be described as the opposite of Bazinian realism, but, critically, the rigidity of this formalist approach mirrors the constructed nature of the social and political relationships depicted and suggests that if the former is changeable so is the latter.<sup>71</sup>

Žilnik's approach is certainly anti-Bazinian as he routinely breaks up the continuity of the filmic world as he engages in dialectical battles with the system for which he shows nothing but cynical contempt. In keeping with Brechtian distaste for emotional involvement, the four main characters of Žilnik's *Early Works* are not fleshed out individuals with emotions but caricatures engaged in battles with themselves, the outcome of which is (and can only be) self-destruction. Žilnik frequently employs cinematic versions of the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*—non-realistic costumes and props, stifled acting, out-of-sync dialogue and sound effects, discontinuity editing. In this way, Žilnik disrupts realism, prevents spectator identification and so has the spectator at all times “present” and capable of taking in the message: an explicit and unmistakable riposte to the Yugoslav political establishment. Perhaps the most striking application of the *effekt* is the entwining of the mission of the four protagonists to reach the workers and peasants with Žilnik's own mission to make the film. Žilnik can be heard giving direction to actors and crew and calling them by their real names. His own “presence” suggests that *Early Works* is a documentary record of itself and therefore a piece of activism that exists in the real world. This is perhaps what gives

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<sup>71</sup> Although, as Levi points out, Makavejev does assume his spectator's Marxist, militant, radical 1960s politics, and therefore narrows down the interpretive variety—both the film and the spectator are inside the same ideology—his montage is in some respects almost Bazinian. Makavejev's montage is not uncompromising, and achieves something similar to what a deep focus/long take-oriented aesthetic does. As Levi puts it, even “an Eisenstein-inspired technique may *itself* successfully give rise to a polyphony of perceptual and intellectual reactions.” Levi, *Disintegration*, 33.

the film its realist credentials: *Early Works* is an intervention, a direct involvement into the actual existing political sphere.

Because he, as Pavle Levi suggests, “tends to avoid scene fragmentation,” prefers deep focus photography and mobile framing—the Metzian “sequence shot” in which “an entire scene [is] treated in a single shot”—Pavlovi ’s aesthetic approach can be described as Bazinian realism, possessing the capacity to “lay bare for you [the world in] all its cruelty and its ugliness.”<sup>72</sup> Yet, as Levi argues, Pavlovi ’s “sequence shot” is so complex and so layered with meaning as to be capable of staging a clash of symbols/ideas comparable to that found in Eisenstein’s montage. Perhaps even more Eisensteinian is Pavlovi ’s tendency to interrupt a sequence with an insert shot which although not independent of the rest of the sequence invokes intellectual responses and, as Levi argues, forms the basis of Pavlovi ’s approach to realism: a strategy “of confronting the viewer with the ‘drastic’ or ‘raw’ image—an image capable of triggering a powerful visceral reaction, commonly a mixture of shock and disgust.”<sup>73</sup> Pavlovi ’s “drastic/raw” image and his montage-like “sequence shot” delimit the diegetic world. Arguably then, Pavlovi ’s approach to realism is not simply one of mirroring the reality and mimicking mechanisms of human perception but one of interruption of the viewing pleasure and therefore one not all that far removed from Makavejev’s or Žilnik’s approaches.

“Some Revolution You Are!”: *Ambush* and *When I am Dead and Gone*

The climate of political change and economic reform—ideological realignment—of the 1960s informs both *Ambush* and *When I am Dead and Gone* and their depictions of Yugoslavia.

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<sup>72</sup> Pavle Levi, “When I’m Dead and Pale,” in *The Cinema of the Balkans*, ed. Dina Iordanova (New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), 57. Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (1974; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 124. André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. 1*, trans. Hugh Gray (1967; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>73</sup> Levi, *Disintegration*, 40.

Both films seem to suggest that political liberalization and economic reforms resulted in a cutthroat society in which citizens aggressively compete with one another in order to survive while the elites continue to hoodwink the masses and enrich themselves. *Ambush* is set shortly before the end of World War II in the area close to the Sarmian Front, northwest of Belgrade, where the Nazis are desperately trying to repel the Red Army and Yugoslav Partisans' push westward. *Ambush* focuses on Ive, an idealistic eighteen year old Partisan and his struggles to navigate the confusion of Yugoslavia's uneasy transition into socialism. As the remaining Chetnik bands are hunted down and ideologically unfit civilians are rounded up, Ive's belief in the revolution is challenged by the brutality with which those judged to be enemy collaborators are dealt. Ive is dismayed by the fear the revolution inspires and enmity it, in turn, produces among his comrades and among the local population. Everyone around Ive is driven by greed and ever-ready for ideological posturing in order to secure privileges. Ive must face the fact that the light of the revolution does not shine but only dimly shimmers—hypocrisy and lack of empathy are the norm, and mere conformism impossible to distinguish from genuine belief in the revolution. Once Ive realizes that the revolution's most ardent ideologues are petty revanchists who spew slogans empty of substance, he is killed by an overeager Partisan patrol who execute him on suspicion of being an enemy collaborator.

Although set 25 years in the past, *Ambush* is about the Yugoslavia of the late 1960s. The film suggests that the supposedly all-inclusive Yugoslav system is unjust and that the elites who would eventually be targeted by student demonstrations in 1968 never intended to honour the principles of the revolution. Those who are timid lose out while those who are aggressive benefit. This dynamic is embodied in the contrast between Ive whose naiveté and Otherness signify the ordinary law-abiding citizen, and corrupt Department of National Security (*Odjeljenje*

za zaštitu naroda, commonly known by the acronym OZNA) policemen Zeka and Joti who signify the political elites.<sup>74</sup> Timid and unambitious Ive seems certain that the new state will look after him. Because of this naiveté, Ive is taken for a fool by those around him. Ive's good nature is juxtaposed with the brutality, provincialism, cronyism, blind ambition, and lack of true belief in the values of the revolution of those he encounters. Zeka, a small-time OZNA functionary is a cynical, drunken, thieving brute with little regard for the ideals of the revolution. Rather than being a mentor to orphaned Ive, Zeka pilfers the aid meant for the peasants and soldiers on the frontline and uses it to pay for sexual services. Zeka's boss Joti, another failed father figure to Ive, cunningly constructs the myth of his own heroism in order to advance within the political ranks. When Ive suggests that Zeka's thieving, womanizing and excessive drinking are unsuitable for a communist building a new society, Zeka replies: "Communism, socialism—I don't care." If Ive represents the naïve masses, Zeka and Joti stand for those in power in Yugoslavia who although unfamiliar with the theoretical nuances of the system know how to manipulate it. They are what the revolution has amounted to: unscrupulous ambition hidden behind posturing and trite revolutionary mythology. In this "new" Yugoslavia, one only need be able to perform an allegiance to communism to advance, and even ordinary citizens mirror the behaviour of the elites. Local peasants and community leaders align themselves with Joti—and disregard his criminal behaviour—in order to socially advance rather than because of genuine belief in the new communist authorities. Eager to show their loyalty, the confused recruits from the patrol that kills Ive are quick to suspect him of being a Chetnik and even quicker to abuse

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<sup>74</sup> Ive's otherness is emphasized through his accent which makes him stand out from the locals. His nickname, Crow, is the product of a misunderstanding after the locals heard him imitate the sound seagulls (common to Dalmatia, where he is from), but thought he sounded more like a crow (common to Serbia, where he moved after his father's death). Although he jokingly claims that "seagulls are far superior to crows," Ive can hardly make any sense of the locals' entanglements.

their (petty) powers. The film suggests that Yugoslavia is not a progressive, modern, nurturing society but one which requires sycophancy, ignorance, and brutality of its citizens. As Daniel Goulding points out, in *Ambush*, it is the revolution that is “ambushed.”<sup>75</sup>

Unlike Ive, Jimmy of *When I am Dead and Gone* knows that the system is inherently unjust and that he can expect no help from the state. Aptly nicknamed the Rowboat, the unemployable petty thief with unrealistic dreams of achieving stardom as a singer drifts through Western Serbia maintaining a fantasy of becoming rich and famous. In the mud of provincial Serbia, Jimmy’s only option for survival is to live off of women desperate for company. Jimmy and his companion Lilica, a con woman who fakes pregnancies in order to elicit sympathy and take money from the “fathers,” are too busy surviving—dodging police as well as vigilante justice—to be truly in love. Jimmy makes it to Belgrade where he is humiliated at a singing competition. Out of options, he reunites with Lilica only to be shot inside an outhouse by the man whom Lilica was blackmailing.

As Pavle Levi suggests, Pavlović’s “film offers a demythologizing portrayal of the Yugoslav socialist everyday, a vision in sharp contrast to the official, state-sponsored stories of general prosperity taking place under the sign of an enthusiastic collective commitment to the communist goals.”<sup>76</sup> Yugoslavia of *Dead and Gone* is desolate and inhospitable, its citizens, driven to desperation by unemployment, are dishonest, grasping, self-righteous, hostile and aggressive.<sup>77</sup> These are, as the political and cultural scholar Gal Kirn suggests, the consequences

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<sup>75</sup> Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 74. The film’s cynicism about the Yugoslav system did not go unnoticed by the authorities. For details on the initial critical reception for *Ambush*, see Tirnani, *Crni Talas*, 83-94.

<sup>76</sup> Levi, *Disintegration*, 45.

<sup>77</sup> *When I’m Dead and Gone* takes place in a Serbian backwater similar to the setting of *Ambush*, but over two decades later. Although there is no formal connection between the two films (and *Dead and Gone* was made two years before), the film provides an insight into just what kind of society corrupt opportunists like Joti have built.

of the 1960s market reform.<sup>78</sup> Unemployment in the 1960s Yugoslavia was tolerated and dealt with via employment bureaus located primarily near state firms, effectively acting as their cheap labour suppliers.<sup>79</sup> Jimmy's odyssey takes him to such employment bureaus throughout the film. The film begins with seasonal workers being let go from an agricultural establishment. When Jimmy protests, the foreman exclaims: "I don't run a cooperative here!"<sup>80</sup> The foreman's assertion hints that although self-management system guarantees the workers a voice, the country still has a very strict top-down organization—state properties have been taken over by the bureaucratic elites who are managing the workers' self-management system.<sup>81</sup> The film points to the contradiction inherent in the system: self-management guarantees input from the workers, yet because in this market-oriented Yugoslavia unemployment is rampant, that guarantee has little value. As Susan Woodward points out, Yugoslavia's turn towards market economy meant precisely this: "No charity, sympathy, or welfare for the unemployed was appropriate, for it would only reduce the resources going to real accumulation and give monies to people who were not contributing to real output."<sup>82</sup>

Pavlović depicts a Yugoslavia torn by the disparity between the promises of prosperity and the reality of hardship caused by experimentation with market socialism. When Jimmy tries

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<sup>78</sup> Kirn, "New Yugoslav Cinema," 24.

<sup>79</sup> Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*, 178. For detailed unemployment data, see Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*, 191-221.

<sup>80</sup> The foreman's use of the first person singular personal pronoun rather than the plural—"I" rather than "we"—symbolically suggests that the control of the job market is in the hands of the managerial class which, counter to the doctrine of the workers' self-management, has assumed the privileges akin to those afforded by Western-style private ownership.

<sup>81</sup> As the historian Gerson Sher points out, the "introduction of workers' self-management in Yugoslavia can be described without exaggeration as a revolutionary departure," but "this was a revolution from above." Sher *Praxis*, 154.

<sup>82</sup> Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*, 177.

to talk to Kidney, the foreman's assistant, about a job, he gets a sobering advice: "Go as far away from here as possible, you fool, or you are screwed." Kidney (who is particularly bitter because he was trained as an economist and now works as a personal assistant) alludes to the state's practice of encouraging the unemployed to look for work outside of the country. As Gal Kirn points out, in *Dead and Gone*, Pavlović identifies "the beginning of the end of socialist welfare."<sup>83</sup> Yugoslavs must compete for the few available jobs or leave. Freeloaders like Jimmy are now in direct conflict with the state because they are not part of the workers' self-management system.<sup>84</sup> For Jimmy, "freedom from" is a death sentence. While Kidney eventually transforms himself and becomes a talent manager, Jimmy miserably fails in his attempts at stardom and must be terminated from the society. Jimmy's misadventures are emblematic of the experiences of the post-war generation whose attitudes were not in alignment with those of their parents. Pavle Levi suggests that Jimmy's pessimistic outlook is that of the Yugoslav youth in general, one of "intellectual and moral apathy, an attitude of resignation toward issues of ideology, provoked by an all-out exhaustion of the grand narratives of human emancipation, be they traditional (religion) or modern (Marxism)."<sup>85</sup> Given the effects of the market reforms, for the younger generation, "the struggle to make a buck," was now more pressing than the "struggle for socialism" anyway.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Kirn, "New Yugoslav Cinema," 42.

<sup>84</sup> As Gal Kirn points out, Jimmy is "a stain on the symbolic order that cannot be integrated." Kirn, "New Yugoslav Cinema," 41.

<sup>85</sup> Levi, *Disintegration*, 37. Jimmy even subtly mocks the revolutionary mythology. When asked by the official at an employment bureau why he does not go to school and rely on his parents, Jimmy answers that both his parents are deceased and that he cannot go to school because as a child he was injured by a mine left from the war which exploded and left him permanently dazed. Jimmy's answer implies that the state's perpetuation of the revolutionary mythology is harming the younger generations.

<sup>86</sup> Zukin, *Beyond Marx and Tito*, 27. The paradoxical combination of socialist and capitalist values sent a contradictory message to the post war generation and frustrated the true believers in socialism, especially the staunch anti-reformers. The film presciently implies that the anti-reformers not only deeply resent the alterations to

## Frontier Justice: If You Are Not With Us, Pretend

*Ambush* deals with the difficult subject of treatment by the state of those who at war's end were perceived as anti-communist or refused to abide by the rules of the agrarian reform and nationalization campaign. The state cannot count on the loyalty of Serbian peasants who supported the Chetnik movement and the Yugoslav government in exile, but must bribe them to attain it. The film begins with a train carrying supplies to peasants, ironically provided by the Allies trying to win over Tito and dissuade him from aligning Yugoslavia with the Soviets. Once the supplies are loaded onto horse-drawn carriages, the convoy is raided by Chetnik forces.<sup>87</sup> The Western supplies frequently change owners who are ideologically disparate, summing up one of the film's main themes: existing on the periphery of ideologically acceptable. *Ambush* examines Yugoslavia on the verge of liberation from the Nazis and making its uneasy but steady transition into socialism based on the Soviet model.<sup>88</sup> The film's depiction of Yugoslavia energized by enthusiasm for Stalin is made ironic by the spectator's knowledge that this enthusiasm was

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the economic and political systems but also the younger generations who, they deem, go too far in criticizing the country's socialist values. The police who chase Jimmy after he steals wallets from a group of seasonal labourers eventually give up, but several pugnacious middle-aged citizens (who do not even know if the youth had actually committed a crime) catch up with Jimmy and beat him furiously. The sequence foresees the young vs. old dynamic of the 1968 student demonstrations (within which the calls for change by the youth losing hope in the future were mistaken for lawlessness and dissent by the war generation who, ironically, equally frustrated by life in Yugoslavia, vented their pent-up aggression on the demonstrators) as well as the crack down on the "liberals" of the early 1970s.

<sup>87</sup> The subtle irony of depicting a Chetnik raid on a Partisan convoy is in the fact that the official revolutionary lore always had the Partisans in the role of the righteous German convoy raiders, but in this case it is the Chetniks who "play" the romantic guerrilla fighters. Unable to feature Chetniks, or their sympathizers, as multidimensional, nuanced characters—as anything but despicable—*Ambush* stays away from in-depth characterization of the Chetnik guerillas, but often subtly hints at the fluidity of the roles of traitors (aggressors) and liberators. A local functionary shows Ive a photo of her young Partisan sister taken after she was captured by the Chetniks. Unlike in the official lore, which depicted them as greasy-bearded butchers, the Chetniks in the photo greatly resemble the Partisans in their appearance.

<sup>88</sup> At first, Yugoslavia aimed to emulate most aspects of the Soviet system. OZNA was formed as Yugoslavia's answer to KGB; industrial resources were nationalized; private property was confiscated; land was redistributed; economy was planned Soviet-style.



temporary—that Titoism replaced Stalinism just a few years later and that the fine differences between the Yugoslav and Soviet models would come to define Yugoslav socialism.<sup>89</sup>

Through its depiction of post-war Yugoslavia as an apt Soviet pupil, *Ambush* alludes to the contemporary conflict between the staunch communist conservatives and the forces of liberalization advocating opening up to the West. In the film, Yugoslav communists seem to be eagerly playing catch up with the Soviets to whose ideal they aspire. Ive, a skilled musician, is hired to help the local orchestra learn how to play Russian revolutionary songs, but when he is unable to get the orchestra to play in tune, Zeka puts on a record with Russian revolutionary songs and exclaims: “Now you will hear real music.” The orchestra’s failed attempts to sound as authentic as a Soviet record is a reference to the conservatives’ attempts to return Yugoslavia to the more dogmatic, even Stalinist path. That the film stages this 1960s conflict in the very early post-war Yugoslavia is appropriate because that is precisely where the roots of the conflict lie. Yugoslavia’s Stalinist path was unsettled by various forms of Western aid delivered to the Yugoslav Partisans during and immediately after the war. In the film, the foreign supplies stolen from the Partisans in the Chetnik raid symbolize this Western method of tempting Tito to distance himself from Stalin. That in *Ambush* the supplies become a sought-after currency that easily crosses ideological barriers and causes discord is appropriate because that is precisely

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<sup>89</sup> Immediately following the war, Yugoslavia was ahead of most communist countries in mirroring the Soviet system, but efforts to establish joint ventures failed after the split with Soviet Union, which soon sent Yugoslavia on the path to liberalization and decentralization in social and political spheres as well as economically. Some of post-war Yugoslavia’s rather independent ambitions became a sticking point with the Soviets who, arguably, aimed to slow down Yugoslavia’s industrialization and make the country’s economy dependent on the Soviet-based industries. David A. Dyker, *Yugoslavia: Socialism, Development and Debt* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 17. For insight on how the relationship between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union deteriorated following the war, see Milovan Djilas, *Fall of the New Class: A History of Communism’s Self-Destruction*, trans. John Loud (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998), 48-105.

what Western aid to Yugoslavia was meant to do.<sup>90</sup> This practice of “aiding” Yugoslavia in order to make it less communist remained part of the Western Yugoslav policy and polarized the political dynamic of the 1960s and 1970s Yugoslavia. It encouraged the liberal forces which saw opening up to the West as the most attractive path for Yugoslavia to take, and caused resentment of the conservatives who saw the West, if not as an outright enemy, then at least as ideologically irreconcilable with Yugoslav socialism.

In the film, the supplies never reach the peasants who are then even asked to contribute to the state coffers. Alluding to the enrichment of the New Class on account of the masses, the film depicts the post-war propaganda campaign aimed at convincing the peasants of the importance of sharing the crops with the state. At a speech given by a local politician, some peasants are sceptical because they feel they are being robbed. When the dissenters are quickly apprehended, Ive pleads with his comrades to reconsider such harsh treatment of peasants who simply objected to what they see as unfair, but he is met with accusations of factionism. Mirroring the pseudo-revolutionary babble of the New Class justifying its usurpation of the state property, the resistance to nationalization of private property is characterized as counterrevolutionary activity. Tellingly, the supplies are shamelessly hoarded by Zeka who uses the goods to pay for sex with a

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<sup>90</sup> When Ive and Zeka confiscate from the local priest—and a suspected Chetnik sympathizer—a saddle bag full of canned food from the raided convoy, Zeka greets the priest with “God help you, Father.” The traditional Serbian greeting—associated with Serbian nationalists, “old” Yugoslavia, and with the Chetnik movement—meant to provoke the priest also implies that ideological fluidity is regulated—and changes of allegiance motivated—by the ebb and flow of the struggle for survival (or, seen more cynically, by temptations of material gain). That the foreign aid changes hands between the Partisans and Chetniks is a subtle reference to the inability of the Allies to decide which Yugoslav anti-Nazi resistance movement to support—Tito’s communist Partisans or the royalist, and staunchly anti-communist, Chetniks of Draža Mihailović. Arguably, the Chetniks were difficult for an outsider to assess. They came from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia, and from the noble tradition of fighters against Ottoman occupation, and formed a volunteer force in the Serbian army (before Yugoslavia was established). During World War II, some Chetniks collaborated with the Nazis, but the overwhelming majority fought against them. Among the latter group, some were staunchly anti-communist while others sympathized with Tito’s Partisans. The royalist Draža Mihailović worked closely with the Yugoslav government in exile and with the British government who at first recognized him—rather than Tito—as the leader of the resistance in Yugoslavia. For more on the Chetnik-Partisan dynamics in World War II, see Fred Singleton, *A Short History of the Yugoslav Peoples* (1985; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 187-190.

young local woman.<sup>91</sup> Zeka's thieving and lack of any real ideological conviction is an allusion to the drive of the New Class to accumulate and maintain privileges on the pretense of being the guardians of the system while having no real allegiance to the socialism.

In *Ambush*, the country's identity is systematically altered to suit the new ideology. In Ive's Serbian literature class, the teacher points out the no longer acceptable imagery found in pre-war Serbian poetry when the class is interrupted by an announcement that the war is over and "liberation is at hand." All that is "old" and therefore ideologically unacceptable is canceled out by "liberation" delivered by the Partisans. In order to prove that his own allegiance is with the "new" ideology, Ive is tasked with preventing some "bourgeois" teenagers from attending the dance party organized by the "Anti-fascist youths." Ive reluctantly calls out the names of those who are unwelcome due to their families' former political associations. When one of the youths fights back, he is quickly taken away and ideologically unsuitable music is replaced with revolutionary songs. The film's setting near the Syrmian Front is a particularly incisive allusion to the state's dilemma of what to do with the ideologically unsuitable every time there are reforms or shifts in policy. The Syrmian Front is alleged to have served as a mechanism for disposal of the perceived enemies of the state. With the country on the verge of liberation, Yugoslavia's authorities needed to eliminate those Serbs who had not supported the Partisans as well as the bourgeois vestiges of the "old" Yugoslavia. The young urban elite, especially from Belgrade, with only basic training were sent to the front to almost certainly die. This was a convenient way of eliminating the ideologically problematic but otherwise innocent individuals

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<sup>91</sup> The film subtly notes the origin of the aid, and of the conflict it produces, when Zeka and the woman read the English language inscriptions on the packages phonetically—the way one would read Serbo-Croatian writing—to a comical effect.

without resorting to executions and potentially tarnishing the positive image of the revolution.<sup>92</sup> Exposed to the dangers of life on or near the frontline, the film's ideological misfits (including eventually Ive himself) conveniently disappear into the fog of war. The film's liminal, "frontier" setting—between free and occupied territory, between capitalism and socialism—is an allusion to the pesky appearance of ideologically unfit whenever reforms took place in post-war Yugoslavia. (The shift away from Stalinism produced persecution of perceived Stalinists; those who went too far in their liberal leanings like Milovan Djilas were ostracised from political life; the liberalization and shift to market socialism (ironically, a kind of return to capitalism) caused a backlash against hardline anti-reformers like Aleksandar Rankovi .)

Writing in 1957, Djilas describes the New Class as one that "instinctively feels that national goods are, in fact, its property."<sup>93</sup> He suggests that because it could not make what it was doing lawful, yet it would not stop doing it, the New Class protected its privileges by initiating reforms whenever it became patently obvious that it was operating under a set of contradictions—unlawfully usurping power and "treating national property as its own."<sup>94</sup> *Ambush* points to the irony that private property previously belonging to the bourgeoisie (such as it was in a mostly peasant country like Yugoslavia) and nationalized following the war simply changed hands and became private property of new elite class. Through its depiction of the process of nationalization of property immediately following World War II, *Ambush* makes a not-so-veiled reference to the New Class which a couple of decades later was monopolizing the

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<sup>92</sup> For details, see Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder: The Second World War in Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst Publishers Ltd., 2008), 258. In the film, those about to be sent for "execution" at the front are ghostly presences in the background. As Ive and Milica kiss for the first time, behind them are visible recruits going through a series of perfunctory exercises before heading to the front.

<sup>93</sup> Djilas, *The New Class*, 65.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

control of that property. Milica's father Dušan Smalajkovi who benefited financially during the war is now seen as an enemy collaborator. The naïve Ive assures Milica that if "he is a good man, you have nothing to worry about." Unlike Ive, Milica realizes that in this new Yugoslavia justice is about eliminating those seen as ideologically incompatible with the new system and then acquiring their property. Smalajkovi's trial is conducted in an environment openly hostile to the accused and interrupted by chants like "Down with the bourgeoisie and kulaks!" The irony of the self-righteous, pseudo-revolutionary sloganeering at the trial would have been rather obvious in the late 1960s when the control over state property had been fully usurped by the elites who aggressively protected their parasitic existence. "In the name of the people," Smalajkovi is jailed for five years and all his property is nationalized.<sup>95</sup> His house is immediately raided and furniture burned in the street by the crowd singing Russian revolutionary songs as Ive walks away in disgust. The film's depiction of the process of dismantling of the "old" Yugoslavia is a metaphor for the reforms of the 1960s, when under the pretense of renewal and improvement, the New Class simply re-solidified its privileged status.

### Reforms and Other Myths

In *Dead and Gone*, the milieu of destitute travelling musicians functions as a metaphorical microcosm for the larger Yugoslav context in which disillusionment threatens to erupt into unrest. Instead of rebelling and fighting for their rights, the disadvantaged musicians apply "reforms." While looking for their next gig, Jimmy, his female "sponsor" Duška, and Duška's former bandmate Moša come across a group of gypsy musicians and their entourage at a

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<sup>95</sup> Smalajkovi defends himself by saying that he was simply doing his job, but the court finds him guilty of having bought a house with profits earned from cooperation with the occupation forces. Subtly insinuating an infringement by the state on citizens' rights, in the verdict, the phrasing of the prison sentence delivered is: "The civil rights are removed for five years."

local tavern.<sup>96</sup> The musicians have no money to order drinks and the waiter kicks them out because the establishment is under new management and the new boss “has had enough of musicians and whores.” Ironically, the “new management” is Vule, himself a former travelling musician, now “a famous radio singer,” who patronisingly encourages the musicians to try and become “someone.” The tavern, of course, symbolizes Yugoslavia under “new management”—following the reforms. Vule’s paternalistic attitude towards his former friends symbolizes the corrupt influence of the trappings of power the New Class enjoys. Reforms are meaningless because now that he is a part of the New Class, Vule works to maintain it. In fact, the life in this “reformed” tavern has gotten worse—no one gets a free drink because the tavern is now run in the spirit of capitalist competition rather than solidarity. The musicians decide to organize themselves and form a self-management style collective, but their meeting outside the tavern disintegrates into empty speeches reminiscent of the rhetoric often heard from the New Class elites. Jimmy sings (horribly) for the gathered musicians before one of them, mimicking speeches glorifying war heroes and shock workers, puts forth a ludicrous proposal that Jimmy “be declared the best singer in Western Serbia.” Perhaps realizing the farcical absurdity of this undeserved honour, Jimmy leaves while muttering to himself: “To hell with all of you.” Jimmy rejects the self-management system and so experiences the paradox of the Yugoslav socialist state: although the system is not equipped to look after the disadvantaged individuals, attempts at being independent from the system are doomed to fail.

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<sup>96</sup> They find Moša hitchhiking after being left on the side of the road by his last band. In a macabre reference to self-immolation as a desperate act of political protest—commemorating Thích Qu ng c, the Vietnamese monk who set himself on fire in 1963 to protest the treatment of Buddhists by Vietnamese authorities, and anticipating the Czech student Jan Palach who did the same in 1969 after Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia—Moša pours gasoline on himself and threatens to light the match, if Duška and Jimmy do not take him on the road with them. They agree, but his threat almost comes to fruition when dimwitted Jimmy lights a cigarette as soon as Moša gets into the car.

Almost everywhere Jimmy goes, unrest is brewing because the state is unable to provide employment for its citizens. The film predicts the 1968 demonstrations against those who mismanaged the country while hiding behind war and revolutionary mythology. Jimmy signs up for menial work at an employment bureau (“For only two nights until the worker returns from sick leave,” he is told) that is comically disorganized and unwelcoming: the foreman tells Jimmy to “watch out for whores” on account of diseases before taking him to the dorm where two men sleep in single beds in appalling conditions. Almost immediately after Jimmy’s arrival, the workers rebel and attack the foreman, shouting: “Kill him!” The opportunistic Jimmy does not care what the workers are rebelling against and uses the commotion to steal his dorm mates’ wallets. Jimmy barely escapes with his life and meets up with Lilica at a scrapyard. When Lilica complains that she is hungry, Jimmy facetiously replies: “Our comrades had to go without food during the war. You can too.” The reference to World War II is an allusion to the implicit meaning of the New Class rhetoric: the problems of today do not compare to the sacrifices of the war generation—those born after the war should learn to appreciate what they *do* have.<sup>97</sup>

*Ambush*, too, suggests that some of the war “heroes” have exaggerated their achievements and use their reputations to gain political clout and, in turn, material possessions. One of the thematic threads that runs through *Ambush* is Ive’s gradual realization that stories of wartime heroism are exercises in mythmaking. The film begins with a Soviet newsreel celebrating Stalin and the might of the Red Army being shown to a captive Yugoslav audience. The wide-eyed Ive watches the film transfixed, not realizing that cults of personality based on lies are about to spring up all around him. Joti is determined to make himself into a war hero,

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<sup>97</sup> Jimmy’s callousness towards Lilica seems integrated into his inability to believe in the promise of a just socialist society; he is adrift because he is unable to connect to individuals or to ideals. As Yugoslav film historian Petar Volk points out, Jimmy is “devoid of all feelings, and, in turn, not burdened by illusions. Such a life means he is a stranger to himself.” Volk, *Istorija jugoslovenskog filma*, 215. (translation mine)

but in order to do that he must stage a daring raid on the Chetnik compound in which someone must die for dramatic purposes and a witness must survive in order to tell others of Joti's heroism. Joti, Zeka and Ive form a posse and pursue the horse mounted Chetniks in a jeep.<sup>98</sup> Restaging the mythical Partisan raids they had likely only heard about, the trio attacks the Chetniks hiding in a monastery. A cunning OZNA man, Joti asks Zeka to sneak up and throw a hand grenade inside. Ironically, Zeka shows some real bravery—he gets most of the Chetniks to surrender, but is wounded in the process. Joti unceremoniously executes all of the surrendered Chetniks except one who must carry the wounded Zeka away to safety while Joti and Ive go looking for Marko, the escaped leader of the Chetnik band. They find him already dead from unknown causes. As this outcome does not make for a heroic story, Joti shoots Marko to make it look like he had gunned him down in battle.

Almost instantly, the raid on Marko's Chetniks becomes part of the local revolutionary folklore. Joti, Zeka and Ive are the heroes who had exterminated the last Chetnik band in the area and in their honour a festive celebration is staged by the village elder Vidoje. As Vidoje praises Joti and villagers sing songs about his heroic deeds, Ive goes looking for Zeka who had been left in the care of the villagers. Ive finds Zeka dead in a local house where no one had even attempted to tend to his wounds. As drunken Vidoje once again tells the story of Joti's heroism, Ive comes back and informs Joti that Zeka is dead. Incensed by Joti's careless attitude, Ive decides to disrupt the celebration: "Why do you let him tell lies? Tell them you shot Marko when he was already dead." Unmoved by Ive's appeals and encouraged by Vidoje's continued praise, Joti ignores Ive who walks away in disgust. Ive is almost instantly punished for his

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<sup>98</sup> This posse is comically ragtag. Ive is armed only with a handgun; the jeep breaks down and the three are forced to hop on a train; realizing just how inadequately prepared they are, Joti jumps off the train to gather more men while Zeka and Ive continue on bicycles.



unwillingness to participate in revolutionary mythmaking.<sup>99</sup> Just outside of the village he is met by a partisan patrol who are suspicious of the stranger. Exasperated Ive exclaims, “Fucking peasants! Some revolution you are!” before he is shot dead.

#### No True Love

Both *Dead and Gone* and *Ambush* point to the alienation and absence of genuine love and affection among the citizens who are struggling to survive while navigating institutional overregulation of almost every aspect of their lives. Erich Fromm suggests that through spontaneous activity, an individual comes to regard him/herself and others as free. He argues: “Love is the foremost component of such spontaneity; not love as the dissolution of the self in another person, not love as the possession of another person, but love as spontaneous affirmation of others, as the union of the individual self.”<sup>100</sup> In *Ambush*, the state apparatus is a direct obstacle to love. Ive finds himself under pressure by his peers for befriending Milica, the daughter of a convicted enemy of the state. Local communist youth organization who enthusiastically raided Smalajkovi’s house are suspicious of Ive because of his refusal to participate in the destruction of property. In order to prove his loyalty, Ive is given a hammer and sickle pendant and told: “Only when this is around Milica’s neck will you be one of us.” The state attaches ideological stipulations to Ive’s love. Milica, however, is uninterested in the modest and unambitious Ive. Since she comes from the politically problematic bourgeois

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<sup>99</sup> Ive’s realization that such self-serving myths are constructed to act as leverage by those with ambitions to attain power is gradual. While looking for Zeka, Ive walks by a group of villagers who discuss what happened at the monastery and mock the official story “as composed by Joti,” subtly alluding to state officials who often cynically utilized the war and its murky mythology to invent their own heroics—a sure way to obtain and/or preserve privileges. Earlier, having witnessed the respect that comes with wartime heroism, Ive himself is tempted to embellish his contribution to the war. He inflates the danger and the number of Chetniks who attacked the supply convoy and neglects to explain that he survived the raid by hiding in the bushes. The lie backfires on Ive when the suspicious listeners tease him by suggesting that Milica has been with someone else while he was busy chasing Chetniks.

<sup>100</sup> Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 287.

background, she must be pragmatic and associate herself with those who can keep her out of harm's way rather than with romantic fools like Ive. Milica realizes that in order to avoid marginalization, one must be calculated even in matters of love. This interference by the state in the matters of love produces neurosis and anxiety. Unlike Jimmy of *Dead and Gone*, Ive is painfully shy and sexually repressed—a predicament that eventually causes Ive to violently lash out. Unimpressed by the meek Ive, Milica starts an affair with her teacher. When Ive confronts Milica, she facetiously replies: “So what? We are free people.” Angered by her response, Ive slaps Milica who reminds Ive that he does not own her, and that, if he is convinced that “this” is freedom, he should accept that Milica is free to associate herself with other comrades. Ive's frustration with his failure to make Milica into a genuine communist—the state's precondition for their love—produces a neurosis and alters Ive's identity from deferential to threatening.<sup>101</sup> Although the end of the war has brought “freedom from” capitalism and “old” Yugoslavia, Ive and Milica have been confined by a new set of institutions which severely limit individuality and spontaneity—their “freedom to.”

In *Dead and Gone*, too, love is interwoven with the state apparatus and given only out of desperation or to in order to ensure survival. Jimmy is a manipulator (however dimwitted) who uses his “provincial charm” to seduce the older women he meets in order to survive.<sup>102</sup> In turn, the women “adopt” him, smothering him with attention not out of genuine love but out of necessity. One of Jimmy's “sponsors,” Mica, is so desperate for any human contact that within minutes of meeting Jimmy, she invites him to her bed and promises security: “I'll take you with

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<sup>101</sup> Following his confrontation with Milica, the increasingly erratic and aggressive Ive becomes eager to prove himself to the authorities and, although initially hesitant, now insists that he join the hunt for the remaining Chetnik bands. Frustrated by a suspect's refusal to give up the Chetnik band's whereabouts, Ive beats the man to get the information.

<sup>102</sup> Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 130.

me. I have an apartment.” Jimmy moves in with Mica who “keeps” him in an upstairs room and treats him like a child—she gives him baths, feeds him marmalade, lights his cigarettes, and tucks him in at night.<sup>103</sup> Even Jimmy’s mother Koviljka who lives in a squalid shanty town and works as a laundress has found a husband out of necessity.<sup>104</sup> After Jimmy locates her on his journey to Belgrade, she struggles to explain her decision to remarry: “I have to survive somehow.” As if to one-up her, Jimmy tells his that his travel companion, Lilica, is his fiancée. Koviljka’s reply, “Good—she looks healthy,” points to the cold logic of having to pair up with one who will be an earner rather than a burden (which, of course, implies that Jimmy is doomed). In the Yugoslavia of *Dead and Gone*, economic logic dictates that even family ties mean little. Koviljka wishes the best for Jimmy, but cannot lend him money because she is saving for a new credenza, and she cannot get Lilica a job at the laundry because “now everyone has their own washing machine.” Her advice to Jimmy is to register with the employment bureau. Dismayed, Jimmy silently walks away.

#### Marching in Different Directions: The Bad and the Ugly

Daniel Goulding suggests that Pavlović’s “was a scorched-earth policy, a demonic urge to find in film the means to shake complacency, to purge away the dross of collective memory, to confront unpleasant truths, and to explore relentlessly the dark corners of the soul and the broken promises of the new socialist order.”<sup>105</sup> Pavlović seems to approach his depictions of “unpleasant truths” and “broken promises” in two ways. One approach can be broadly described as naturalism whereby Pavlović exposes the viewer to aspects of everyday reality without overt

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<sup>103</sup> Perhaps Mica is ready to overlook Jimmy’s parasitic ways because the patriarchal, provincial mentality dictates that she must have a man in her life lest she be considered “loose.”

<sup>104</sup> The fate or whereabouts of Jimmy’s father are left undiscussed.

<sup>105</sup> Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 73.

sentimentality or judgment. Specifically, this entails showing the characters at their most uncouth—when they are vulgar, indecent, desperate, afraid, vulnerable.<sup>106</sup> But Pavlović's camera does not smugly dwell on these “common” moments in order to make them seem authentic. Pavlović's approach is less fly-on-the-wall observation and more Vertovian “life caught unawares” approach whereby the camera provokes the subject into acting (out) “naturally.” These moments appear posed rather than “real” and although banal, they are revelations. In the sequence in which Jimmy encounters his mother's new husband, Pavlović's camera takes a moment to observe the man through the window before Jimmy knocks on the door. The brief image shows the man inside a decrepit shack, wearing a greasy undershirt, entertaining a young boy with a crass limerick as the boy stares directly into the camera (and into Lilica who is standing in the window and whose POV the viewer is getting). If there is realism in the image, it is not to be found in its quotidian, unromanticised nature, but rather it lies in its ability to metaphorize with ease the consequences of the country's reforms and experiments with market socialism. The portrait of the man as crude, unkempt, presumably unemployed—an emasculated, failed breadwinner—is a portrait of the Yugoslav man.

Pavle Levi sees this tendency to utilize images suspended in diegesis to elicit a dialectical response as akin to Eisensteinian montage. While Eisenstein used extraneous images that were typically not of the diegetic world, Pavlović preserves the diegesis by utilizing “drastic/raw”

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<sup>106</sup> Pavlović's own thoughts on how filmmakers should approach their job elucidates the logic behind his aesthetics: “We must go into basements in which wage labourers sleep, into mess halls, into Catholic churches on Saturday nights, and into village drinking holes; stop by medical schools where naked corpses float in formaldehyde; and go into hospital pathology departments; and in cemeteries, unnoticed, bid goodbyes to the deceased, together with their families and friends. We must record expressions on the faces of people when they play music, when they mate, when they are in pain, when they settle in to read in the evening, when they are hungry. Covertly, like a sniper, the film artist should point the camera lens at life's bellybutton and let bursts of celluloid gunfire riddle the body from all sides. Again, on the screen, the resurrection in all its unfalsified glory.” Quoted in *Dekalogija o materiji i smrti: Skica za portret Živojina Pavlovića*, directed by Marko Novaković, 2013. (translation mine)

images that come from the diegetic world yet function to temporarily arrest the story progression and ask to be considered independently.<sup>107</sup> Levi suggests that just like Eisenstein's montage consists of aggressive, shocking images meant to evoke a visceral and intellectual response, so does Pavlovi's "drastic/raw" approach.<sup>108</sup> Levi points to the film's final image, depicting Jimmy slumped over, having been shot while defecating inside an outhouse as an example of "drastic/raw" image, and points to the equivalence between its ability to disturb the diagesis and Jimmy's ability to disrupt the perception that the reforms have been successful. As Levi points out, in "a system perpetually concerned with managing the appearance of productivity and social prosperity," Jimmy stands out and so parallels the "drastic/raw" image.<sup>109</sup> It is precisely in this sense—as ripples in what is supposed to be calm water—that "drastic/raw" images function to alert the viewer to the imperfections in the Yugoslav system, and can therefore be said to contribute to the film's large picture, comprehensive Lukácsian realism.

This is only one example of how Pavlovi employs the banal—often automatically taken as realistic—as a metaphor—rather than as a true-to-life depiction—to sum up the societal ills. As director Slobodan Šijan points out, a persistent characteristic of Pavlovi's aesthetic is that it stresses "the beauty of the ugly."<sup>110</sup> In *Dead and Gone*, Pavlovi depicts sex as an awkward and unsightly display of sagging bodies writhing in dark shadows.<sup>111</sup> Sex is not a pleasurable

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<sup>107</sup> Levi, *Disintegration*, 40-44.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>110</sup> *Dekalogija o materiji i smrti*, directed by Novakovi, 2013. (translation mine)

<sup>111</sup> One of his screenwriting students recalls an occasion when Pavlovi, after carefully listening to a student's story pitch for a derivative horror film, bluntly asked: "These monsters of yours, do they fuck?" After the blushing student admitted that "I guess they do," Pavlovi asked: "Well then, *how* do they fuck?" *Dekalogija o materiji i smrti*, directed by Novakovi, 2013. (translation mine)

activity; it happens out of desperation rather than as an expression of love. Mica, the aging mail sorter Jimmy encounters on a train while evading the conductor, begs Jimmy for sex while flattering and reassuring him within the same breath: “You’re so handsome. I am healthy, I swear on my mother’s grave.” Seduction and flirtation are absent because Mica’s desire disregards the conventions of morality. This desire to connect with another human being is so strong that it even disregards the anxiety over the future symbolized by the reference to the fear of sexually transmitted diseases. The shot not only strikingly displays Mica’s pathetic longing for human contact but, like the shot of Koviljka’s husband, also briefly interrupts the diegesis and insists on being considered as a dialectically charged stand-alone unit. Owing to Mica’s plainness and to her unexpected, disarming honesty as she, slumped on the bed, pleads for sex, the shot is devastatingly “ugly” and therefore in the tradition of realism and even naturalism. Yet, as Levi points out, Pavlovi ’s “drastic/raw” image, although Bazininan—“integrated into the diegesis”—also functions to disturb what would otherwise be a straightforward realism/naturalism.<sup>112</sup> As Levi suggests, “Pavlovi assigns to art the function of socially destructive criticism” and exposes the clash between the irrational forces that maintain life and the consciousness.<sup>113</sup> Perhaps it is precisely this clash that Pavlovi ’s “drastic/raw” images contain within them. What makes the shot of Mica “beautiful” and still contributes to its “ugly” realism is its poetic ability to metaphorize the Yugoslav crisis: the alienation of the citizens from one another caused by the gradual failure of the socialist system.

The other approach relies less on the “rawness” of the image and more on the montage-like juxtaposition of two or more meaning-laden visual elements within a “sequence shot.” In

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<sup>112</sup> Levi, *Disintegration*, 44.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

both *Ambush* and *Dead and Gone* Pavlović frequently packs the dialectical attack of Eisensteinian montage into the Bazinian uninterrupted shot. In the sequence in which Joti recruits Ive for the Chetnik raid, Pavlović strikingly juxtaposes within a single shot Ive's innocence with Joti's criminality. The shot of Ive trying to catch up on his homework effectively becomes two shots when Joti appears to Ive as a ghostly reflection in the mirror in front of him. A harbinger of death, Joti severs Ive from his childhood and eventually from life. In the sequence in which Ive finds Zeka dead, Pavlović juxtaposes in a single shot the pointless deaths attendant the country's transition into socialism with the rituals of glorification of those responsible for the deaths. Pavlović's camera pans from the chilling image of blood that had poured out of Zeka's mouth and congealed on the bed sheets to the window through which the celebration of Joti's "heroism" can be seen. Both "montages" bluntly point to just how distasteful revolutionary mythology is given the deliberateness and callousness with which sacrificial lambs like Ive and Zeka were disposed of in the process of its fabrication.<sup>114</sup>

Jimmy's only emotionally sincere moment in *Dead and Gone* comes in a "sequence shot." Standing in front of a low-flying Yugoslav flag aboard a ferry whose destination he does not know, Jimmy asks his traveling companion: "Don't you think I want a different life?" The plea of a dream-chasing vagabond aboard the "Yugoslav" ferry whose itinerary is a mystery is the plea of all who have been searching in vain for a better life promised by the state. Another example is the sequence depicting Jimmy seeking employment at an agricultural establishment. The shot depicts Jimmy as he answers the employment questionnaire form at the desk while in the background a goat standing up on its hind legs munches on a piece of the wall, and a man

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<sup>114</sup> Arguably, the effect of the "montages" is as Brechtian (and as Eisensteinian) as anything found in *Early Works* or *WR* as they "provoke in the viewer an internal dialogue" about the distortion of revolutionary ideals and their replacement with dogma. Volk, *Istorija jugoslovenskog filma*, 216.

brazenly gropes a woman who walks by him. In a single deep focus “sequence shot” that would not be out of place in an absurdist comedy, Pavlović sums up the wretched social climate in the country: the country is being torn down by incompetent politicians whose inability to deal with the unemployment problem is causing the citizens to become increasingly aggressive towards each other. Another “sequence shot” alludes to Jimmy’s mistaken belief that he is free and in charge of his fate. While giving Jimmy singing lessons in a hotel room, Duška blows into a small figurine of a man with paddle-like hands to make them rotate. Directly above her is a Swiss cuckoo clock with a pendulum designed as a tiny figurine of man sitting on swing. The props (especially the paddle-handed man—Jimmy is, after all nicknamed, the Rowboat) serve to symbolically depict Jimmy as an individual who although he may have “freedom from,” does not have “freedom to.” Instead, he moves “mechanically,” as dictated by mysterious external forces—the elites who implemented the reforms rather than as a free individual. By facilitating dialectical engagement, all three “sequence shots” offer insight into reality far beyond the capacity of conventional realism/naturalism, limited to blunt depictions of sordid, filthy, or vulgar aspects of life.

The most dialectically rich and thoroughly insightful “sequence shot” of the film appears in the sequence that takes the viewer on a “short journey through Yugoslavia, cutting its way through the whole society.”<sup>115</sup> The sequence depicts a jubilant Jimmy after his rendition of the Yugoslav rock standard, “Pred svaki izlazak u grad,” is met by a thunderous applause by the army recruits.<sup>116</sup> Following his performance, Jimmy walks by a large group of workers at the

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<sup>115</sup> Kirn, “New Yugoslav Cinema,” 24.

<sup>116</sup> The film depicts the Yugoslav National Army as an assemblage of brainless, unsophisticated brutes, incompatible with both the urban youth and the working class. The soldiers’ reaction to Jimmy’s performance is juxtaposed with that of the young urban crowd who, after Jimmy makes it to Belgrade and performs the same song at a talent show, boo him off the stage.



moment when they are informing the local politicians that they are starting a “work stoppage action.”<sup>117</sup> One politician is upset that the crowd of workers has interrupted his conversation with two young female workers (whose housing problem he has “solved” by inviting them to stay with him). Cornered, he urges the workers to reconsider their decision to strike, asks that they solve the issue during the workers’ council session, and pleads with them: “Why would you strike? This is a workers’ state!” The “sequence shot” begins at the moment when the striking workers remind the politician of a simple fact: “You created ‘political factories’ and now we have to suffer because of it?” The workers seem to understand that phraseology about the workers being in charge is, as Djilas puts it, just “general legal fiction.”<sup>118</sup> It is significant that the workers use the term “political factories.” The term was widely used to refer to unprofitable factories run into the ground by managerial elites who typically blamed the workers for the failures and compensated for the losses by reducing wages which, in turn, caused “work stoppage action.” That the politician is so desperately fighting to dissuade the workers from striking points to the efforts by the New Class to, once industrialization and increased production secured its position, ensure its own longevity. In other words, the New Class was aware of itself as a class and maintained itself by inflating the importance of its members’ skills in managing the economy and by the “unity of belief and iron discipline” of those who belonged to it.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Almost heretically, another workers exclaims, “Say it plainly. It’s a strike!” The term “work stoppage” was less confrontational and therefore preferred in a socialist society which, at least formally, was open to the airing of the workers’ grievances as it perfected the self-management system. A “strike” was something that happened (likely illegally) in capitalist societies where the workers were exploited and disenfranchised. For finer points of this distinction in Yugoslavia, see Duško Sekuli, “Štrajk ili obustava rada: jedan sociološki pristup,” *Kulturni radnik: organ Saveza kulturno-prosvjetnih društava Hrvatske* 40, no. 6 (1987): 23-33.

<sup>118</sup> Djilas, *The New Class*, 65.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 38.

Tellingly, at the precise moment when the marching workers dismiss the desperate efforts of the New Class to appease them and hang onto its privileges, a group of soldiers marches by in the direction opposite from that of the workers. In a graphic conflict reminiscent of Eisenstein's montage, the "sequence shot" alludes to a radical misalignment between the state, represented by the soldiers, and the working class. Having emerged directly from Tito's Partisan guerillas and therefore possessing impeccable credentials, the Yugoslav National Army was perhaps the state's most valued asset and its most powerful facet. It could not be invoked in a negative context in public discourse and its status as the protector of Yugoslav socialism was untouchable. Pavlović daringly depicts it not only as having a provincial mindset and consisting of obedient dimwits who clap when they are supposed to, but also as a threat to those who challenge the state. The "sequence shot" seems to suggest that if discontent was to erupt into unrest, the soldiers might march directly into the workers rather than by them. The "sequence shot" suggests that although ostensibly empowered by the self-management system, the workers have no say in how the economy is run at state or at local level; that in reality, this is a job reserved for the highly specialized yet bungling managerial class. Perhaps most daringly, through its depiction of the Yugoslav National Army, the shot also suggests that the state is symbolically out of step with the people, and indeed in opposition to those who seek to hold accountable the politicians responsible for mishandling the country's economy.

Yugoslav(i)a in Praxis: *Early Works* and *WR: Mysteries of the Organism*

Surely the most Brechtian of all *Black Wave* films, Želimir Žilnik's *Early Works* is a fragmented treatise on the state of social and political affairs in Yugoslavia following the 1968 student demonstrations. Inspired by Marx, four young people travel through rural Serbia with a mission of alerting the lumpen proletariat to its unfavourable economic conditions and to its

alienation. In a nod to Marxist humanist movements like the *Praxis School*, which also found inspiration in Marx's more philosophical early writing, they set out to remind the workers and peasants to put into practice the seemingly forgotten theoretical framework on which Yugoslav socialism rested. During their mission, Marko, Dragiša, Kruno and Yugoslava encounter defeatism and crushing economic and intellectual poverty; they find that empty stomachs make for hostile and narrow minds, ill-equipped to consider the finer points of Yugoslavia's path to communism. Unable to win over the antagonistic population, the foursome fail in their quest. Crucially, however, along the way, their own weaknesses and prejudices—elitism, sexism, intellectual futility—are exposed. The sting of these realizations and the disappointment of failure transform into a deadly aggression, and the three vain and insecure men turn onto Yugoslava, their sole female companion. They kill her in order to conceal their failure and alleviate the shame of defeat. Yugoslava's murder is, of course, a metaphorical death of the Yugoslav socialist ideals. It serves to graphically underscore the film's objective to alert the viewer to the systematic concealment of the disconnect between what Yugoslavia was meant to be—a socialist country no longer bogged down by class struggle, forging a path towards communism via self-management—and what it was in reality—a society ruled by an elite class of bureaucrats focused on maintaining their own privileged status.

Makavejev's *WR* also assesses the status of Yugoslavia's socialist project following the student protests against the country's "Red Bourgeoisie," using some decidedly Brechtian techniques. Employing a documentary overview of Wilhelm Reich's life and his theories of psychosexual development and totalitarianism, the film juxtaposes sexually liberated culture of the capitalist West which seemingly prohibits nothing, and Yugoslav society which strives to become sexually liberated and politically liberal. Through a tragicomic love story between

Milena, an overbearing Yugoslav “revolutionary,” seemingly ever-ready to start a sexual revolution, and Vladimir Ilych, a soft-spoken but sexually repressed and controlling Soviet dancer, the film suggests that Yugoslav socialism has been arrested in a moment far from its logical outcome—it has little chance of ever culminating in communism. As per Reich, repression of sexual desires is unhealthy and results in tyrannical leaders and repressive societies. Surely then, the film asserts in jest, abstinence is counterrevolutionary, because, like the sexual act, a revolution must eventually come to a (satisfying) conclusion. *WR* suggests that maintaining the appearance of revolutionary progress in perpetuum is a pointless exercise in self-discipline. This exercise amounts to a denial of pleasure, of spontaneity, and of self-expression, all of which ultimately produces neurotic authoritarians who must vent their built-up energy via murderous aggression. *WR* suggests that Yugoslavia’s never-ending journey towards an even better future is a ruse without culmination used to justify a repressive society.

Completely eschewing traditional realism, *WR* and *Early Works* rely on the tools of Brecht’s Epic Theatre to depict Yugoslav reality. They provide insight into their social and political environment; they make the spectator carefully and objectively consider their arguments and inquiries rather than gloss over them by distancing the spectator from the depiction; they make the spectator see him/herself in their representations; they make him/her understand that their social and political conditions are alterable; they feature characters which are iconic, exemplary of a particular societal problem or emblematic of a social class; although narrative, they are fragmented; they rely on montage.<sup>120</sup> Both films can also be said to espouse the intellectual traditions of Marxist humanism of the *Praxis School* as they go about revealing to the Yugoslav spectator the social and political conditions in which he/she exists: the economic

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<sup>120</sup> For details, see Brecht, “The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre,” 37.

consequences of dabbling in market socialism, class division, manipulation of the masses by the corrupt political elites who exploit the mythology of World War II in order to stay in power.

“There is no going back!”: (Re)starting a Revolution

Integral part of the context and background of both *WR* and *Early Works* were the 1968 student demonstrations in Belgrade which saw 40,000 students demand explanations for the country’s economic problems and openly call out the New Class. In the 1960s, Yugoslavia attempted to open up more towards the West through partial integration into Western economy, a process which demanded austerity measures and had a negative impact on the standard of living. Furthermore, the workers’ self-management system which envisioned the workers in control of production of goods was not functioning as designed. The factories attempting to implement the system were often referred to as “political factories” because they were conceived by idealistic communist politicians without regard for the rules of market which, paradoxically, now had to be respected. Economic reforms that followed produced unemployment which the state “alleviated” by encouraging workers to find employment in Western Europe, especially Germany where the Yugoslavs mostly did degrading menial labour. The students took over the University of Belgrade, clashed with the police in the streets until Tito himself appeased them in a TV address.

Informed by the Marxist humanist thought of the *Praxis School* and the spirit of the student demonstrations which occurred simultaneously with youth unrest in the West, *WR* mocks Yugoslavia’s lack of progress towards communism with acidic wit. The film critiques the state by mocking the presumed macho virility of its authoritarians and by establishing a cause-effect relationship between repressed sexuality and institutional repression. Far from looking at the West as a beacon of freedom, Makavejev is suspicious of the ability of Western-style liberties,

especially sexual revolution, to result in genuinely free individuals.<sup>121</sup> In the film, the myth of freedom is an integral part of sexual revolution and its commodification. As Jackie Curtis, the transgendered Andy Warhol collaborator, and his/her boyfriend stroll down Times Square of the pre-Giuliani era, when sex, along with just about anything else, could be purchased there, the film's soundtrack plays radio commercial jingles. Jackie's gender-crossing identity and unrepressed sexuality are only "at home" against the background of over-commercialized Times Square.<sup>122</sup> Discussing the film, scholar James Roy MacBean observes that owing to the "permissiveness and hedonism cultivated by advertising" in capitalist societies, sex is a compulsively sought after commodity like any other.<sup>123</sup> Rather than a symptom of liberty, open sexuality is a symptom (and a tool) of repression.

In the tradition of Brecht's Epic Theatre, and perhaps half-mocking the technique, Makavejev stages crude and rather obvious montages that further analogize sex and repression in the contexts of both capitalist West and communist East. In the Eisensteinian intellectual montage sequence which begins with Lenin's ballet-dancing alter ego, Vladimir, being freed from the dresser where he was put by the sex-starved shock worker Radmilovi, Makavejev

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<sup>121</sup> As Pavle Levi suggests, in *WR*, "McCarthyism, the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Leninism, Stalinism, and their legacy are all seen as symptoms of the political neuroses caused by unresolved sexual issues. Achievements of the more liberated American counterculture are not simply taken for granted either but are reproached with a dose of equivocation. They are sympathetically endorsed yet at the same time questioned about the limits of their political subversiveness and their ability to fully escape the grip of consumerism and commodity fetishism." Levi, *Disintegration*, 24.

<sup>122</sup> Yet, while Jackie parades confidently, the passersby nervously stiffen up at the sight of his/her gender transgression. As Makavejev points out, Jackie's in-betweenness feels like aggression to someone who is "well-defended with his own armor—physical and psychical, clothes and social status" because "[t]here's obviously some little cracks happening in that armor. They don't know how to control their own system, and so they react with anger." Edgardo Cozarinsky and Carlos Clarens, "Dusan Makavejev Interview," *Film Comment* 11, no. 3 (1975): 49.

<sup>123</sup> Macbean goes on to add: "The old Puritan morality which was necessary to a society dominated by scarcity has given way to a new, more permissive but equally repressive morality geared to serve the needs of the consumer society." James Roy Macbean, "Sex and Politics: Wilhelm Reich, World Revolution, and Makavejev's *WR*," *Film Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1972): 8.

utilizes inserts from Mikhail Chiaureli's film about Stalin, *The Vow* (1946). First, Stalin is depicted entering a large hall with his advisors; Makavejev then cuts to a red plastic cast of *Screw* magazine editor Jim Buckley's penis being taken out of the molding by the artist Nancy Godfrey; the next cut is back to Stalin, but this time the footage is tinted red—the same shade as the replica of the pornographer's penis. The connection Makavejev makes between the capitalist West and communist East is farcical but also deliberate and uncompromisingly clear. Red and erect, Stalin announces: "We have completed the first phase of communism." The allusion to Stalin's claims that the Soviet system was to evolve until it became truly communist and the state has withered away is ironic because, having the benefit of hindsight, the viewer knows that Stalin had no intentions of facilitating the end of the state and that the Soviet system remained arrested in a totalitarian moment—"the first phase of communism." The allusion is unmistakably to Yugoslav political elites who, although they purport to abhor Stalinism and pay lip service to progress towards communism, employ similar delay tactics in order to maintain the state which they are, of course, uniquely equipped to run. Like Jim Buckley's penis, the progress has been frozen. Lenin's original intent has been stuffed into a dresser as crypto Stalinists keep delaying the climax of the revolution. Far from placating the West, Makavejev's montage implies that there, too, complete freedom is an unattainable fetish. The arrested erection of the distressed rather than gratified Jim Buckley suggests that freedom is a commodity, a piece of "art" to be desired and, in any event, does not happen as a result of sexual permissiveness.

Makavejev compounds this point in another Eisensteinian/Brechtian (and, again, derisive) montage which produces dialectical tension. For psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, a sexually unrepressed individual is unlikely to impose or accept authoritarianism of any kind.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> As postulated in Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, trans. Vincent R. Carfagno (1946; repr., New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970).

Makavejev mocks Reich's generalization and suggests that in practice, real world political dynamics are hardly that uncomplicated. Milena, the film's ditzy sex-starved "revolutionary," gives a rousing speech in the courtyard of her apartment building to the bemused tenants—the masses—offering her views on sex and revolution: "Abstinence is unhealthy, inhuman, and what's worse, counterrevolutionary!"; "Between socialism and physical love there can be no conflict!" She exclaims that free love—available in the West—is what the Yugoslav revolution (and presumably communist revolutions everywhere) has been missing. Soon, Milena is pulled into a bastardized version of the Kozara Dance (*Kozara ko Kolo*) by the elated "masses" and sings: "Without fucking there is no life." Makavejev's next cut is to a pulsating mass of Chinese communists euphorically saluting their leaders in the Tiananmen Square, performing, as Pavle Levi puts it, "movement and arousal of enormous proportions."<sup>125</sup> The juxtaposition produces a sarcastic comment on Reich's assertions: too much fucking will only produce greater numbers of those who want to be controlled by authoritarian leaders.

Makavejev's approach to characterization is akin to the Brechtian *Gestus* technique—repeated expressive and exaggerated interpretive gestures meant to embody the motivations and psychology of the character which, in turn, places the character within his/her class or social milieu.<sup>126</sup> The Russian ballet dancer Vladimir Ilych is, of course, Vladimir Ilych Lenin; shock worker Radmilovi, who can barely suppress his sexual appetites, stands for the Yugoslav working class who, incensed by injustice, can barely repress its rage. Milena's character encapsulates the failure of the Yugoslav socialist project—there is little substance behind

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<sup>125</sup> Levi *Disintegration*, 27.

<sup>126</sup> For details, see Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre," in *Brecht On Theatre: the Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. John Willett (1964; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 195-196.



sloganeering about revolution. When during her courtyard speech Milena exclaims, “There is no going back!”, she, of course, means that there can be no deviation from the socialist path. It is not, however, what Milena says but how she says it that Makavejev emphasizes. Mimicking similar speeches routinely given by the communist elites, the pronouncement comes across as insincere and rehearsed.<sup>127</sup> The courtyard speech is only the apex of Milena’s intense revolutionary posturing. Throughout the film, Milena’s energetic, commanding presence and her insistence on offering her opinion on just about everything to just about everyone create a pattern that suggests that Milena is over-performing her revolutionary identity. Milena’s erectness in particular recalls an earlier sequence in which one of Wilhelm Reich’s disciples, Dr. Alexander Lowen, explains how much body posture can reveal about a person. Milena’s posture then must encapsulate the most vital aspect of her character. Bluntly pointing to Yugoslav political elites, Milena’s overbearing, bullish behavior implies that those who shout the loudest and possess inflexible attitudes are bound to intimidate others and take charge. Milena’s aggressive, single-minded attitude, her erect stance suggest an uncompromising, dictatorial attitude. Milena, at least in part, embodies the unchecked ambition of the New Class who sermonized about socialist equality yet bullishly administered and maintained an inherently undemocratic system.<sup>128</sup>

In the spirit of Brechtian agitation, through Milena’s character, Makavejev disturbs the conventional realism, but bluntly draws attention to the actual Yugoslav social and political

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<sup>127</sup> Milena’s didactic speech, especially as it builds to a crescendo, not only seems disingenuous but also alludes to the perversion of the socialist system. Milena is rather calculated in her choice of lovers. She has traded the motor oil-covered worker Radmilovi , and so symbolically the lumpen proletariat for which he stands, for an antiseptic New Class apparatchik who can turn her on sexually with his intellectual abilities—with more abstract promises of future perfection—rather than with folksy charm and carnality.

<sup>128</sup> As film scholar Herbert Eagle points out, Milena’s “style is demagoguery.” She “converts Reich’s teachings into political slogans, and harangues the masses with reproaches about their sexual repression.” Herbert Eagle, “Yugoslav Marxist Humanism and the Films of Dušan Makavejev,” in *Politics, Art and Commitment in the East European Cinema*, ed. David W. Paul (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1983), 143.

context and establishes a connection between the world of the film and that of the spectator. Milena's character is played by Milena Dravić, an iconic Yugoslav actress who played heroic and chaste female Partisan fighters in war epics like *Kozara* (Bulajić, 1962). Dressed in a faux Partisan uniform while giving a rousing speech, Milena is emblematic of popular representations of World War II. Although often endearing, such representations, it was understood, were propagandistic, meant to build up revolutionary mythology, validate the state, and, in turn, entrench the elites in their positions. Makavejev's wry choice to cast Milena Dravić is an alienation technique—the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*—employed in order to disrupt the illusion inherent in the medium: to deny the spectator an emotional connection to the character which allows the spectator to recognize the film as a construct rather than as “natural,” and to, in turn, engage in a critical assessment and recognition of the film's aims.<sup>129</sup> That the mythological, mild-mannered, heroic Partisan has now become a dippy loudmouth is a transformation that Yugoslav viewers would have inevitably found both amusing and distracting. Dravić's casting is a cross-pollination between ideologically disparate works and therefore doused in irony, yet it is also an example of type-casting as *WR*'s Milena is, after all, a version of Dravić's wholesome characters. Decked out in a Partisan uniform, *WR*'s Milena is an unhinged counterpart to the restrained, virginal Partisans Dravić plays in her other films. Dravić's presence then reminds the viewer that *WR* is not a stand-alone film but, paradoxically, also part of the tradition which it mocks. Most importantly, by alluding to the Partisan films through Milena's character, Makavejev once again asserts that revolutionary identity is a performance.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> For details, see Bertolt Brecht, “Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting,” in *Brecht On Theatre: the Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. John Willett (1964; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 91-99.

<sup>130</sup> Film scholar Raymond Durnat points out that “Milena's rabble-rousing outfit, with military jacket, long legs and boots, echoes swinging London's soldier-guerilla chic” Raymond Durnat, *WR—Mysteries of the Organism* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 65.

Žilnik's *Early Works*, too, is focused on "investigating the communist pathology and the specific Yugoslav 'third way' into socialism."<sup>131</sup> It does this by questioning the official narrative of Yugoslavia's progress via a cinéma vérité-like aesthetic approach which cannot but expose the film's own artificiality and contrivance while simultaneously affirming its ability to have a point of view and therefore be a tool of political activism. As the title card at the very beginning of *Early Works* suggests, this is "political theatre" meant to make its audience recognize the film's universe as a replica of their own—one in which the social and political conditions of its "players" are also those of the spectators. Most importantly, those conditions are open to inquiry and subject to change rather than immutable. Marina Gržini calls this "new expressive realism" and suggests that the film is "not a direct reflection of reality but rather of presupposed documentary and ideological views about that reality."<sup>132</sup> The film is almost interactive in how it informs the Yugoslav spectator that his/her society is not living up to the expectations and in its design to place itself in active opposition to the state indoctrination machinery which functions to obscure that fact.

The film's opening montage introduces the "problem": Yugoslava's family, representing, of course, Yugoslavia itself, and their living conditions. The montage which begins with Yugoslava's soaped up face greeting the spectators with "Good morning," proceeds to show Yugoslava's father first knocking down an outhouse, and then standing over the open septic tank; speaking directly to the spectator, Yugoslava's younger sister explains that life today is no different from life in the "old" Yugoslavia: "In school, we learn about healthy food that makes people happy and able to work better, but we never get to eat such food. I sleep in the same bed

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<sup>131</sup> Marina Gržini, "Early Works," in *The Cinema of the Balkans*, ed. Dina Iordanova (New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), 67.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 71.

as my sister, but that's ok because she rarely sleeps at home." That *Early Works* begins with a morning greeting is appropriate because the film aims to wake up the spectator to the severity of Yugoslavia's crisis.<sup>133</sup> The montage focuses on the reduction in the standard of living of the Yugoslavs which, in turn, is responsible for the discontent sweeping the country. The film immediately and fearlessly wades into very sensitive territory and so warns the spectator of its own radical methods—that it is about to criticize what does not get criticized and about to uncover what is typically repressed. Without hesitation, the film makes the most heretical claim possible which is that this “new” socialist Yugoslavia is as unjust as the “old” capitalist one. Yugoslava's sister alludes to the country's housing problem (“I sleep in the same bed as my sister.”) and suggests that—unimaginably for a socialist country—some in Yugoslavia are facing poverty. She implies that this predicament will provoke unrest and work stoppages because without “healthy food” there are no happy people who can “work better.” Coming just a year after the student demonstration of 1968, and at a time when work stoppages were becoming common, this is not just innocuous banter. The knocking down of the outhouse used by Yugoslava's family to expose the septic tank symbolically suggests that the film will be vulgar and that viewing it will be a challenging exercise which, although unpalatable, must be done.

*Early Works* employs slogans and imagery that directly allude to student demonstrations. In reference to the protesting students' attempts to make it clear that they were against dogmatic authoritarian politicians, for a more democratic socialist Yugoslavia, and decidedly not interested in destabilizing the country, a title card appears that alludes to this qualification: “Democracy-Yes. Break up-No.” The foursome of *Early Works*, however, seem to be readying for action more radical than that taken by the 1968 demonstrators. They practice attacking barricades,

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<sup>133</sup> Compounding and broadening the inference, “good morning” is also a common sarcastic response to a statement of the patently obvious.

prepare Molotov cocktails, and perfect their throwing techniques. In a series of disjointed montages, the film sums up for the Yugoslav spectator (who may have already forgotten) the reasons which prompted the 1968 demonstrations and are now prompting Yugoslava and her cohorts to prepare for violent confrontation with some undefined enemy. With a heavy dose of irony, the four “demonstrators” whistle the tune and recite the verses from the International; implying that Yugoslavs are unable to make up their minds whether to rebel or be obedient subjects, Kruno is lead around in chains while announcing, “I am the people. Lead me,” and then shouting, “Down with Red Bourgeoisie!” Yugoslava’s father is shown falling into the septic tank he had exposed earlier and then announcing: “It reeks of trouble.” He is then shown arriving home drunk, exploding into rage, and beating Yugoslava and her mother. The actions of Yugoslava’s father here represent both the potential for violent unrest among the working class far more disruptive than the student demonstrations and the attitudes of the politicians who abuse their privileges. This is when Yugoslava realizes that “in this house exist feudal laws” and leaves home seemingly for good in order to inspire change. The montages sum up for the spectator the recent events and outline the attendant issues the film itself will be addressing.

In an homage to France, the country whose student demonstrations inspired similar movements across Europe and even in socialist countries, the foursome travels the countryside in a Citroen Dyane as they try to locate the forgotten ideals of the revolution.<sup>134</sup> They drive through villages, announcing that the peasants will be ruined because they are stuck in their peasant ways, and that peasants and workers must unite. This appeal to the peasants is significant because it addresses a glaring omission of both the student demonstrations and of Yugoslav socialism. Although the 1968 student demonstrators expressed solidarity with the workers’

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<sup>134</sup> Marina Gržini sees *Early Works* as “a socialist Easy Rider.” Gržini, “Early Works,” 70.

unions, the peasants' voices remained underrepresented. Sociologist Bogdan Denitch points out that "even though they contributed heavily to the economic development of the country," the peasants were underprivileged because "there is no specific organization for the articulation of peasant interests as a whole, analogous to the trade unions."<sup>135</sup> Tellingly, this is where the foursome's progress comes to a halt. They push the Citroen up a hill, but the car keeps rolling back. The solution is to get a peasant to help and use a horse to take the car uphill like a carriage while the patronizing "revolutionaries" show disdain for the man who is helping them by jokingly shouting: "To Berlin!" The film seems to suggest that because the Yugoslav society is blatantly unjust and its democracy not inclusive, any progress, like the Citroen, gets rolled back. It is, of course, fittingly ironic that it is the peasants who do the hard work and get the Citroen moving, but the film suggests, the peasants are bound to sooner or later lash out on account of being exploited and disregarded. When the Citroen gets stuck in the mud later on, the three men are beaten and Yugoslava gang raped by local peasants.

The foursome try to rationalize the failure of their mission among the peasants. Delicate, thin-skinned, and befuddled by the lack of respect, they "lose their grounding."<sup>136</sup> Yugoslava angrily announces that she is "happy that there will be no peasants in communism." Others agree: "For a pig farmer, revolution is over as soon as he becomes a bureaucrat" because "you can't expect him to pursue revolution when he is content to be out of the pig pen." Although meant as an insult to peasants, the pig farmer analogy also very precisely sums up Djilas' assessment of the New Class as bureaucrats from peasant backgrounds who, having come to

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<sup>135</sup> Bogdan Denitch, *The Legitimation of a Revolution: The Yugoslav Case* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 19.

<sup>136</sup> Volk, *Istorija jugoslovenskog filma*, 393. (translation mine)

power, found they had achieved their maximum potential and therefore made no further effort to advance the country towards communism for fear of losing their current class status. The film suggest that this de facto acceptance of the class system went counter to the main fiction of the Yugoslav system—denial of the existence of social stratification. Tatjana Aleksi suggest that “Žilnik’s peasants and proletarians are so stupefied by hard labor and poverty that they seem utterly incapable of comprehending the idea of their own class and individual emancipation.”<sup>137</sup> The four “revolutionaries” also struggle to comprehend this notion that Yugoslavia is a class society and that they, too, belong to a social class. Yugoslava points to the irony of having the luxury of time to visit the workers and peasants because “we didn’t have to work 8 hours a day. We were unable to help them because we were just observers.” Kruno, however, argues that “it is not about helping, but about sharing the fate of the majority whose conditions we cannot change anyway.” Unlike Yugoslava, the three men seem disinclined to re-evaluate their ability to inspire change in others as well as their own positionality and blame the peasants for being incorrigible.

The four press on and refocus their efforts onto the working class. They find themselves employed at a foundry where Marko, Dragiša and Kruno cannot even hear each other over the noise of the machinery and Yugoslava passes out from the heat of the furnaces. The deafening noise hints to both the spectator and to the “revolutionaries” that the workers voices, ironically, remain unheard in a “workers’ state.” When Kruno tries to agitate and speak to the workers as they leave the foundry, no one is willing to listen. The workers do not have the inclination to organize because they are exhausted after a day’s work. When Marko smugly admonishes them by saying, “Whoever does not rebel against this, deserves his fate,” Dragiša reminds him to not

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<sup>137</sup> Aleksi , *The Sacrificed Body*, 112.

“play dumb. You know how many there are out there waiting to replace anyone who leaves.” It is also for fear of losing what they have—what their class *does* provide—that Yugoslav workers seem willing to accept their treatment by the state. The four stay at a workers’ dorm, once a palatial house now a barely standing ruin which, of course, stands for Yugoslavia itself. Yugoslavia is outraged at the workers’ apathy towards their living conditions and, before finally abandoning the quest to enlighten the workers, she berates them: “In an earl’s castle, you live like pigs. As if revolution was about plugging up the sewers and enjoying one’s own stench.” Once again, Yugoslavia’s remark points to the inability of the four “revolutionaries” to see just how difficult it is for the workers to identify their class status let alone be able to improve their conditions. The dilapidated dorm—the nightmare that the fantasy of the workers’ self-management has become—delimits the field of vision for the working class. The New Class bureaucrats rather than the workers themselves are in charge of the production process and, in turn, of the workers’ fates. As Djilas points out, “self-management, like decentralization, becomes another property of the new class, to be managed, dispensed with, and distorted in its own interest.”<sup>138</sup>

Arguably, *Early Works* was “radically disaffiliated from mainstream assumptions about socialist reality” and its avant-garde aesthetic equally as radical for the conservative Yugoslav establishment unaccustomed to public displays that methodically and deliberately tested the ideological and aesthetic foundations of the system.<sup>139</sup> The film possesses a brash drive to expose

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<sup>138</sup> Zukin *Beyond Marx and Tito*, 6-7.

<sup>139</sup> Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 75. *Early Works* clearly struck a nerve with authorities. According to the director, it was deemed “anarcho-liberal” and containing worrisome “Maoist deviations.” Pavle Levi and Želimir Žilnik, “Europe’s Internal Exiles: Sound, Image, and Performance of Identity in Želimir Žilnik’s Films,” in *Ethnic Europe: Mobility, Identity, and Conflict in a Globalized World*, ed. Roland Hsu (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 116. The film was to be officially banned for “disturbing the Yugoslav public,” but Žilnik cleverly defended himself and the film in court by placating the system and claiming that Yugoslav society was far stronger than those seeking to ban the film realize, and that the film therefore cannot undermine it. As recalled by the



the failures of the Yugoslav socialist system. Yet, it is not a dismissal of socialism, but rather “a critical enrichment of the socialist discourse.”<sup>140</sup> Discussing the need for the medium of film to abandon the vulgarity of heroes and “human interest” stories which would, in turn, uncouple it from both “the bourgeois novel” and from capitalism, Brecht suggests that “film demands external action and not introspective psychology”; when it “dissolves everything into processes,” film, like capitalism, is revealed for what it truly is.<sup>141</sup> In the spirit of Brecht, *Early Works* exposes its own artificial construct and even the process of its own making: sound and image are often out of sync; images are upturned. The film “proper” is interrupted by brief glimpses of the process of its making that show Žilnik, his crew and actors as they make the film the viewer is watching: Žilnik can be heard giving instructions to the actors and addressing them by their real names; he shouts revolutionary slogans in order to get the peasants to respond more enthusiastically. As Branislav Dimitrijević points out, there is a marked “lack of distinction between the ‘acted’ and ‘spontaneous.’”<sup>142</sup> These moments take the viewer “out” of the film and eliminate any possibility of being fooled by the inherent illusion of cinema. More importantly, they constitute a chronicle of the film’s own production. Rather than facilitating a seamless entry

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filmmaker in *Zabranjeni bez zabrane*, directed by Tucaković and Nikodijević, 2007. Although it was not technically banned, and even received the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival in 1969, the film had to wait for its Yugoslav theatrical premiere until 1982. (Notably, that same year, a brief analysis of the film was included in a textbook on the history of contemporary Yugoslav cinema. See Petar Volk, *Savremeni jugoslovenski film* (Beograd: Univerzitet umetnosti, 1982), 289-293.) For more on the attempt to ban the film in the court, and on the film’s initial critical reception, see Tirnanić, *Crni Talas*, 66-82. For insight into production models employed by Žilnik (and by other *Black Wave* filmmakers), see Gal Kirn, Dubravka Sekulić and Žiga Testen, “Those who Make Revolutions Only Halfway Dig their Own Graves,” in *Surfing the Black: Yugoslav Black Wave Cinema and Its Transgressive Moments*, eds. Gal Kirn, Dubravka Sekulić and Žiga Testen (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academie, 2012), 57-77.

<sup>140</sup> Branislav Dimitrijević, “Behind Scepticism Lies the Fire of a Revolutionary!,” in *Želimir Žilnik: For an Idea—Against Status Quo*, ed. Branislav Dimitrijević (Novi Sad: Playground Produkcija, 2009), 141.

<sup>141</sup> Bertolt Brecht, “The Film, the Novel, and the Epic Theatre,” in *Brecht On Theatre: the Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. John Willett (1964; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 50.

<sup>142</sup> Dimitrijević, “Behind Scepticism,” 138.

into a fantasy, the film reveals the process of its own production and shows that filmmaking is work like any other, performed by workers like all others and, arguably, even organized in the spirit of self-management. In fact, as Pavle Levi suggests, *Early Works* is “a direct immersion of the filmmaking apparatus into the sphere of social production.”<sup>143</sup> Žilnik makes the viewer aware that this is a film with a perspective and a mission, an approach which implicitly constitutes a critique of dominant ideological assumptions: while the communist elites hide the flaws of the system behind an airtight ideological seal, Žilnik’s film is permeable and openly declares that all perspectives, including its own, can be manipulated.<sup>144</sup> As per Brecht’s recipe, *Early Works* “dissolves” itself in its own “processes.” The film then “functions as a form of praxis” precisely because it is committed “to a total demystification of the processes of production in all their manifestations: film production and sociopolitical activity alike.”<sup>145</sup> This is cinema “as a mode of play” with a clear goal to be accomplished, and even if the problem has not been resolved (the workers and peasants have not been enlightened and made aware of their true conditions), “the making of the film will still have constituted a worthy exercise in social activism.”<sup>146</sup>

### The Body of Revolution

The status of women in a society that nominally proclaims equality yet remains deeply patriarchal becomes a reference point for the film’s critique of Yugoslav socialism. Yugoslava leaves home in search of true revolution because she can no longer stand her violent father’s authoritarian ways, but eventually realizes why her father is violent: “He is miserable when he gets home after work.” The workers’ frustration with being at the bottom of the class hierarchy

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<sup>143</sup> Levi and Žilnik, “Europe’s Internal Exiles,” 117.

<sup>144</sup> Dimitrijević, “Behind Scepticism,” 139.

<sup>145</sup> Levi and Žilnik, “Europe’s Internal Exiles,” 114.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 117.

in a state which they supposedly rule is transmuted into aggression towards their loved ones.

Žilnik spells out a cause-effect relationship between the system's unjust treatment of the workers by the elites with violence against women. Žilnik surely knew that an argument for women's rights could not be dismissed in a country which claims to be progressive on gender relations, so he cleverly depicts women as an underprivileged class to allude to the puzzling fact of existence of a class system in a supposedly class-free society. During a sexual education workshop specifically aimed at women at a Serbian village, Yugoslavia stresses that the most efficient method of contraception would be a change of mentality among the men. She suggests that progressive intellectuals have already thoroughly addressed the status of women in the society and stresses that in a marriage, the man "must stop acting like the woman's owner and women must not be exploited like the proletariat." She provocatively asserts: "Our technological revolution will liberate women. In any case, women are stronger than men and will rule the men in a decade or two." At that very moment, Žilnik's own voice exclaims, "Long Live March 8, the International Women's Day!" to which the crowd replies: "Long Live!" Žilnik alludes to the fact that the working class is at the bottom of the social and political hierarchy in Yugoslavia when it should be at the top. The ironic proclamations in support of the Women's Day and the promise that women "will rule the men" are as hollow as the promise that the proletariat will one day be in power. Žilnik uses the issue of women's reproductive rights in a patriarchal society where men feel entitled to women's bodies as an analogy to suggest that in Yugoslavia equality may exist in principle but in practice it does not: the women—proletariat—are exploited by the men—the New Class—who enjoy their privileges with impunity.

*Early Works* consistently employs the theme of male aggression aimed at the female body.<sup>147</sup> Throughout the film, Dragiša, Marko and Kruno “remedy” their inadequacies as revolutionaries by macho posturing, and, whenever challenged by Yugoslava, they resort to sexual aggression towards her. Žilnik’s depiction of the three men as unintelligent, ineffectual and seemingly entitled to abuse Yugoslava alludes to the empty posturing of Yugoslav communist ideologues, their inadequacy as leaders, their abuses of power, and especially their sense of entitlement to state property. Naked Dragiša turns the pages of Marx’s *Early Works* using a revolver as he becomes inappropriately forthright in his interest in Yugoslava’s sexual habits: “Have you ever screwed until you could screw no more? How many times in one night? With you, I could do it seven times in a row.” When challenged by Yugoslava about his sexual prowess, Dragiša mock shoots Yugoslava as she pleads with him through tears to not “joke around.” The “shooting” foreshadows Yugoslava’s death at the end of the film and alludes to the pervasive threat of violence by the elites against those who challenge their privileged class status. The men’s possessiveness, their impulse to dominate and subjugate Yugoslava, their sexual aggression towards her metaphorize the elites who routinely abuse their powers. Dragiša, Marko and Kruno—the New Class in the making—are obstacles to Yugoslava’s and so symbolically to Yugoslavia’s emancipation.

In *Early Works* (as in most *Black Wave* films), “pervasive misogyny assumes the meaning of a powerful metaphor for all forms of atavism that block social development.”<sup>148</sup> In another Brechtian move, Žilnik cleverly takes advantage of the former Miss Yugoslavia, Milja

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<sup>147</sup> It should be noted that it is not just the female, but also the male body that is abused in multiple ways. Arguably, as film critic Goran Goci suggests, “the protagonists’ investment in their adventure takes place solely on the level of the body.” Quoted in Levi and Žilnik, “Europe’s Internal Exiles,” 119.

<sup>148</sup> Aleksi, *The Sacrificed Body*, 114.

Vujanovič's status as a sex symbol when he cast her in the role of Yugoslava. Invoking the notion of body politic, Žilnik describes the film as being "about the beauty of homeland and the beauty of female body."<sup>149</sup> Since Vujanovič, in a sense, really *was* Yugoslavia, her victimization and maltreatment in *Early Works* graphically represents the breakdown of the country as a community with shared humanist values. The peasants of *Early Works* turn on their would-be emancipators because they have been severely neglected by the state and cannot be pushed to enlightenment overnight by bogus revolutionaries. Tatjana Aleksić points out that the foursome "are not resistant to backwardness, primitivism, and distrust of the very people whose liberation they have set out to promote. Getting closer to nature, free love, and uninhibited existence, the protagonists realize their own inhibitions and unpreparedness for a life without structure and regulations."<sup>150</sup> The peasants are a mirror; their aggression a manifestation of the heretofore hidden but constitutive element of the psyche of the three men which soon comes on display in their own conduct. Rattled by the realization of their own "backwardness" and "primitivism—of their inability to press on with revolution—the three men abandon lofty goals and begin to aggressively satisfy their more base desires. Symbolizing the sense of entitlement and abuses of power by the New Class, the main object of their desire/aggression is Yugoslav(i)a's body.

Freud suggests that a "man will show a sentimental enthusiasm for women whom he deeply respects but who do not excite him to sexual activities, and he will only be potent with other women whom he does not 'love' and thinks little of or even despises."<sup>151</sup> Yugoslava's outspoken nature which displays her intellectual superiority functions to ruin the men's

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<sup>149</sup> Quoted in Tirnani, *Crni Talas*, 66. (translation mine)

<sup>150</sup> Aleksić, *The Sacrificed Body*, 111.

<sup>151</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," in *Civilization, Society and Religion: Group Psychology, Civilization and Its Discontents and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey, ed. Albert Dickson (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 142.

perception of her as a sex object. In a rare moment of unguarded tenderness, Marko shows that he can be sexually excited by a woman who is intellectual and whom he “respects.” When he and Yugoslava engage in foreplay in the shower of the workers’ dorm, she explains to him that satisfying a healthy sexual desire is a requirement for a healthy socialist society. Yugoslava reminds Marko that he has Engels to thank that he is about to get “lucky.” Without Engels’ affirmation of the importance of physical love among the proletariat without regard for the oppressive bourgeois institution of marriage that sanctions patriarchy and inequality, she would not be willing to have sex with him. Tellingly, the two are soon interrupted by Dragiša and Kruno and must stop. Invoking Djilas assertion about the “unity of belief and iron discipline” with which the New Class maintained itself, Marko’s transgression—respecting the woman—is seen by Dragiša and Kruno as a deviation that cannot be tolerated. Having failed to protect Yugoslava from peasant rapists whose aggression was a result of frustration with the state, Dragiša, Marko and Kruno have a chance to reform (and perhaps reignite the revolution), but, like the New Class, they look out only after one another and cannot get let go of their exclusive privilege to own and abuse Yugoslav(i)a. The three men are reconstituted into a pack—a distinct class—who can now jointly take Yugoslav(i)a’s body.

As Tatjana Aleksi points out, this “brotherhood of men abandons both ideals and love and thus conspires to sacrifice their only chance of liberation.”<sup>152</sup> When Marko, Dragiša and Kruno come to visit Yugoslava who has returned home following the failure of the mission, she is no longer interested in associating with them: “Gone with the wind, boys.” Stung by the rejection, Marko explains the real reason why they have visited her: “We want to see if you can take all three of us at the same time.” When Yugoslava mocks them by saying, “You have never

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<sup>152</sup> Aleksi, *The Sacrificed Body*, 112.

brought anything to its conclusion,” Marko pulls out a revolver and shoots her dead. The three men cover Yugoslavia’s body with a red communist flag, throw a Molotov cocktail on it and watch silently as flames shoot up in the air. They walk away from the scene following the title card with a quote from a leader of the French Revolution, Louis Antoine de Saint-Just: “Those who make revolution halfway, only dig their own graves.” Implicitly conceding “failure” at its own conclusion, the film analogizes the sexual act without a climax with perils of not fully completing revolutionary changes to sociopolitical institutions. By situating this analogy as its central conceptual thread, the film includes gender in its critique of dominant ideological attitudes. *Early Works* cleverly aims to humiliate the political elites by questioning both their sexual and political prowess—by depicting them as vain, thin skinned dilettantes who blame others for their ineffectuality, as men who can only restore their egos with sexual aggression towards women.

In *WR*, Makavejev also analogizes abuse of power by rigid authoritarians with aggression towards the female body. Milena, representing Yugoslavia as an enthusiastic communist upstart, is entranced by Vladimir Ilych, an iteration of Lenin and therefore an authority on all matters communist. Unfortunately for her, Milena sexuality is inextricably connected to revolution: she appears to be sexually stimulated by Vladimir’s bona fide communist credentials and her sexual energy seems to fuel her revolutionary enthusiasm. For Milena, as for Yugoslavia, sexual desire and revolutionary zeal do go naturally together. As Milena joyfully spouts revolutionary slogans and lays out her ideas about sexual liberation, Vladimir is increasingly confused and uncomfortable and patronizes Milena as if she were an overly enthusiastic pupil. Milena’s desire to desire freely and now symbolizes true revolution.<sup>153</sup> Conversely, Vladimir represents the

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<sup>153</sup> Discussing *WR*, film scholar Constantine Parvulescu points out that “Fascistoid revolutions are revolutions without joy, fixated on the future, and repressive when it comes to the pleasure of the moment. For

repressive state forces that manage everything including, and perhaps especially, their subjects' desire. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue: "If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society [...] and no society can tolerate a position of real desire without its structures of exploitation, servitude, and hierarchy being compromised."<sup>154</sup> When, at the end of the film, Milena places her hand on Vladimir's crotch in order to soothe his anger, he responds violently because he cannot allow "real desire." His response is brutal: he kills Milena by severing her head with an ice skate. Only in her death—her severed head speaking to the viewer from the morgue slab in another Brechtian moment—does Milena recognize "Vladimir's incurable rigidity and authoritarianism."<sup>155</sup> Only in her death does she see Vladimir for what he truly is: "a genuine red fascist."

Like *Early Works*, *WR* employs gender inequality and patriarchy as powerful metaphors for socialism stunted: the class system, the abuses of power by the rigid authoritarians. Vladimir's denial of desire, his patronizing and paternalistic attitude towards Milena who wants to be his equal suggest that he is not willing to be free and therefore is not an authentic communist. When challenged by another's display of desire, Vladimir violently lashes out, symbolically suggesting that the state does not allow genuine freedom. Like *Early Works*, *WR* makes the female body into a graphic casualty of the system guided by the fragility of the male

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Reichians, the revolution is always in the present. It is a radical embrace of the present as present. Joy cannot be deferred. Any form of deferral, any road or path to joy, already implies distortion, perversion, alienation." Constantine Parvulescu, "Betrayed Promises: Politics and Sexual Revolution in the Films of Márta Mészáros, Miloš Forman, and Dušan Makavejev," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 2 (2009): 97.

<sup>154</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972; repr., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983), 116.

<sup>155</sup> Levi, *Disintegration*, 26.



ego. Milena dies a gruesome death—her body is destroyed—because Vladimir cannot accept that she can possess the capacity to desire independently. As Tatjana Aleksi points out, both Milena and Yugoslavia “pay dearly for their involvement with the revolutionary project and for witnessing the men’s repressed sexual urges, underperformance, or impotence in bed and in matters of revolution and politics.”<sup>156</sup> In both *WR* and *Early Works*, feminist emancipation unsettles the men and results in aggression towards the female body.

## Conclusion

*Black Wave* boldly challenged the Yugoslav establishment to free itself of shallow dogmatism and move towards a more democratic society. The films openly mocked the inchoate quasi-Marxist posturing of the state functionaries and elites, badly mismanaging the country’s economy, by pointing to the system’s glaring contradictions. While they did not necessarily argue for abandonment of socialism, *Black Wave* filmmakers explicitly or implicitly called for Yugoslavia to be restructured into a functioning socialist democracy. *Black Wave* films openly dealt with topics like corruption, cronyism, unemployment and increasing reduction in the standard of living. They were critical of the failure of the state to effectively apply the self-management system and especially of the communist establishment’s undemocratic grip on power and so offered representations which were in sync with the country’s reality. *Black Wave* films were suppressed at the urging of the conservatives uneasy with student demonstrations of June 1968, followed by the “liberal” movements in Croatia and Serbia of the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>157</sup> The knee-jerk reaction to the demands for decentralization and greater democracy

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<sup>156</sup> Aleksi, *The Sacrificed Body*, 119.

<sup>157</sup> And who, having seen the violent reaction of the Soviets to Alexander Dubček and the Prague Spring in 1968, likely feared that similar blowback awaited Yugoslavia if “liberalism” went too far.

extended into the sphere of art and culture, including cinema, and ushered in an era of what Žilnik called “new dogmatism.”<sup>158</sup> This meant dealing harshly with ideological misfits in culture, arts, education, and media. As far as film was concerned, this meant professional isolation, intimidation, and suppression (although not outright banning) of the most radical films and directors for their alleged negativity and defeatism. Many *Black Wave* films were condemned as “anarcho-liberal,” but the very fact that *Black Wave* was allowed to happen suggests that the state was not heavily invested in suppressing all forms of challenges issued to it.

*Black Wave* was not an aesthetically or ideological uniform movement. It emerged spontaneously as part of the broader push for decentralization, democratization and economic liberalization—a push away from dogmatism and towards Marxist humanism. *Black Wave* filmmakers chose to openly comment on the social and political life in Yugoslavia. They tested the boundaries of what was acceptable to say in Yugoslavia’s public sphere—to what extent the state could be challenged—and so served as a barometer of freedom. *Black Wave* films were artistic articulations of the stinging criticism of the Yugoslav political establishment offered by Milovan Djilas and the *Praxis School* philosophers. Like Djilas, *Black Wave* filmmakers asked that Yugoslavia be what it was meant to be—a country without class divisions. Like Djilas, they suggested that Yugoslav political elites were uninterested in allowing this to happen because they were enjoying the benefits of being the class in charge. *The Praxis School* and *Black Wave* can be seen as analogous in that they both “(in)directly criticized the role of the Party in the Yugoslav society.”<sup>159</sup> Although the self-management system by definition contained a promise

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<sup>158</sup> *Zabranjeni bez zabrane*, directed by Tucaković and Nikodijević, 2007.

<sup>159</sup> Despite the obvious similarities, some, like Gal Kirn, although acknowledging it, find the connection between *Black Wave* and *Praxis* rather tenuous, and reject the “humanist hypothesis.” Kirn, “New Yugoslav Cinema,” 21. Želimir Žilnik himself argues that many *Black Wave* filmmakers were “more influenced by Camus and Sartre, who we found much more in sync with reality, than by ‘the humanism imposed from above’ of some Marxists [like Marcuse, Habermas, Bloch, Bauman], as we wanted to speak about reality itself, not its promise.”

of a more democratic Yugoslavia and seemed to constitute a step towards the ultimate goal of communism, a prosperous, democratic, and just society seemed to remain in the realm of theory. Party leaders spouted obtuse quasi-Marxist slogans, but in practice, they did little to actually employ a functioning workers' self-management system. This disparity between the promises—couched in slogans and passages from theoretical works—and their practical application is precisely what many *Black Wave* films dared to point out. Žilnik's *Early Works* specifically questions whether the “classics of Marxism” are applicable to a political environment run by corrupt elites or if they end being just “ideological chatter.”<sup>160</sup> In *Early Works*, the lack of insight by peasants and workers into Yugoslavia's political dynamic, the absence of awareness of their true position in the societal hierarchy, and their inability to better their position is perhaps best metaphorized by the mud through which they have to trudge daily. As cultural and art historian Anna Schober points out, progress is prevented by the mud which stands for the paroxysms of provincialism.<sup>161</sup> *Black Wave* filmmakers saw the establishment as consisting of authoritarian, uncultured apparatchiks whose provincial backgrounds perhaps even predisposed them to create a distinct social class and perform a communist version of bourgeois elitism while their mythological wartime sacrifices gave them the license to abuse power with impunity.

Perhaps the last film in the spirit of the *Black Wave*, Makavejev's *WR*, too, openly mocks the Yugoslav system and depicts it as run by intellectually shallow, sexually frustrated tyrannical men whose insecurities drive them to murderous aggression. Like Žilnik's film, *WR* was

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Kirn, Sekuli , and Testen, “Those who Make Revolutions,” 71. Žilnik also insists that *Praxis* philosophers never offered support to the persecuted *Black Wave* filmmakers. Kirn, Sekuli , and Testen, “Those who Make Revolutions,” 89.

<sup>160</sup> Kirn, Sekuli , and Testen, “Those who Make Revolutions,” 71.

<sup>161</sup> Anna Schober, *The Cinema Makers: Public Life and the Exhibition of Difference in South-Eastern and Central Europe Since the 1960s* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 116.

internationally acclaimed, went undistributed in Yugoslavia, and was a subject of heated public debates.<sup>162</sup> Bogdan Tirnani suggests that *WR* deals with a particular form of alienation, “the mechanical separation of the basic bodily urges from the intellectual sphere,” and “asks the question why the social structures which to us may not appear to be totalitarian focus so much energy on suppressing personal freedoms and on making sure they do not escape its control.”<sup>163</sup> Sometimes oversimplifying and never taking itself too seriously (perhaps to its detriment), the film finds “inspiration” in Wilhelm Reich’s writing and, like Reich, does not hesitate to “diagnose” all tyrants—communist or otherwise—as sexually repressed fascists who are “frightened by pleasure and liberated bodies,” who are “fixated on the future” and who find a replacement for joy “in political ambitions and in talk about ideals, the building of a new and better world.”<sup>164</sup> Their oppressive authority, in turn, produces more authoritarian rulers as well as more submissive masses.<sup>165</sup> Hinting at a possibility of a catastrophic outcome to Yugoslavia’s rebellion against the Soviet Union (as in Czechoslovakia), *WR*’s Milena dies at the hands of ballet dancer whose mild manners conceal an intense rage and who cannot bear a woman who freely expresses her sexual desire—desire for freedom—even if she *is* in awe of him.

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<sup>162</sup> For details, see Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 142, and Tirnani, *Crni Talas*, 120-133.

<sup>163</sup> Tirnani, *Crni Talas*, 115. (translation mine)

<sup>164</sup> Parvulescu, “Betrayed Promises,” 97.

<sup>165</sup> Reich’s suggestion that the masses tend to be willing to be subjugated is a kind of ghostly presence in *WR* which almost takes on the properties of the Freudian *uncanny* in that it reveals something profound to the Yugoslav spectators about themselves. It bears stressing here, as Deleuze and Guattari do, that “Reich is at his profoundest as a thinker when he refuses to accept ignorance or illusion on the part of the masses as an explanation of fascism, and demands an explanation that will take their desires into account, an explanation formulated in terms of desire: no, the masses were not innocent dupes; at a certain point, under a certain set of conditions, they *wanted* fascism, and it is this perversion of the desire of the masses that needs to be accounted for.” Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 29.

More radical *Black Wave* filmmakers like Žilnik aimed not just to pin point the improprieties of the New Class or the shortcomings of the system but to—in the spirit of Bertolt Brecht—educate and engage the viewer intellectually with the intricacies of his/her political environment and to, in turn, affect change. In *Early Works*, the journey into provincial Serbia—literally and symbolically inward—reveals a staggering ignorance among the masses. The journey “uncovers relations untouched by the promise of the new socialist consciousness: brutality and violence permeating the relationships of man to man and customarily perpetuated against women.”<sup>166</sup> Žilnik points out that he and other filmmakers like him aimed “to radically change the structure of filmmaking in the country, to engage in an open polemic with the state’s authoritarian ideological dogma and its propaganda machinery.”<sup>167</sup> The act of making *Early Works* is a form of social activism—a mission aimed at solving a problem. Branislav Dimitrijević suggests that Žilnik’s approach to filmmaking is in the “spirit of activism, of interventionism, of severing ties with formal conventions of ‘professional’ cinematography, and of the unambiguously leftist political attitudes combining ironic criticism with enthusiastic activism.”<sup>168</sup> Žilnik utilizes cinema to affect the political environment and uses it as a revolutionary tool—to transform the society.

Like Makavejev’s and Žilnik’s, Pavlović’s depictions of the human condition in *Ambush* and *When I’m Dead and Gone* teeter between “life as a biological phenomenon” and “consciousness.”<sup>169</sup> Unlike Makavejev and Žilnik, Pavlović did not see traditional realism as offensive. Though admittedly harsh and pessimistic, his view is never so cynical or derisive to be

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<sup>166</sup> Aleksić, *The Sacrificed Body*, 111.

<sup>167</sup> Levi and Žilnik, “Europe’s Internal Exiles,” 113.

<sup>168</sup> Dimitrijević, “Behind Scepticism,” 137-138.

<sup>169</sup> Levi, *Disintegration*, 43.

declared thoroughly anti-humanist. Pavlović's focus on the demoralizing effects on the individual of being excluded from the system—the effects of the market reforms and of rapid industrialization of the country—fall in the tradition of social realism. Pavlović's films rely on drama, emotion, and poignancy to depict the alienation and disillusionment of the Yugoslav individual, while Žilnik and Makavejev offer Brechtian pamphlet-like commentaries on the mechanisms by which the Yugoslavs had given up their freedoms. Pavlović's characters are realistic and integrated into the totality of the reality represented on screen and so encourage spectator identification. Makavejev and Žilnik call attention to the fact that their characters are played by actors—that they exist in a constructed reality—and so insist on a critical engagement with the text rather than spectator identification. Žilnik's and Makavejev's films are populated by characters emblematic in the Brechtian sense—meant to represent a particular social class and its ideological trappings. The characters are depicted with a comically heavy handed symbolism and speak in slogans and witticisms in order to (in the spirit of one-upmanship) engage with official state propaganda.

Pavlović relies not on such Brechtian devices but on glimpses into the misery of characters whose Aristotelian tragic flaw is the notion they can go against the prevalent currents. Anywhere he goes, Jimmy—a lazy dreamer—disrupts the status quo. He is a victim of the system's paradoxes. He cannot survive outside of the self-management system, but the system would not have Jimmy and eventually disposes of him. Ivo of *Ambush* is equally—and equally paradoxically—unfit for the Yugoslav society only because he actually believes in it. Those who hardly believe in socialism and aggressively exploit the system, benefit, while those like Ivo are marginalized. Fittingly, *Ambush* concludes with a kitschy celebration of Yugoslav socialism overseen by crooked politicians while Ivo, the one true believer in the revolution, is discarded. In

*Dead and Gone* and *Ambush* Pavlović puts on display the poverty, hypocrisy, violence, and corruption of the system and so makes the spectator understand what precisely causes his characters' tragic ends. Jimmy's and Ive's tragic destinies are perhaps more instructive than Milena's or Yugoslava's (which are equally tragic) misadventures as to just what was wrong with Yugoslavia. All four of these films, however, are exceptionally daring works which engage with their social and political environment and elucidate aspects of Yugoslavia socialist experiment. The films point to the replacement of freedom with dogmatic authoritarianism of the state and to hardships experienced by the individual in periods of rapid transition from one set of social institutions to another or during economic and political reforms. The films suggest that "revolutionary" societal changes which are manifestly about political emancipation are also periods of suppression of freedom and often hardly differ from what came before them.

## Chapter 2

## The Road to Kinshasa: Working Class Heroes and Allegories of Decline

Did not my house use to stand here?

—Milutin, *In the Name of the People*

## Staying Afloat: Yugoslavia in the Global Economy

The first considerable complication Yugoslavia had to face after World War II came in the form of a disagreement with the Soviets in 1948. Although it maintained a Soviet-style system early on, Yugoslavia quickly distanced itself from Stalin and his bullish policies. Unhappy about Tito's refusal to come under full Soviet control, Stalin accused Yugoslavia of betraying socialist ideals and expelled it from the Cominform.<sup>170</sup> As a result, Yugoslavia became largely isolated from communist Europe and turned into a peculiar, Western-oriented socialist country with a market economy that required at least partial integration into the near-global capitalist economic system. The country's strategy included development of economic ties with the West, especially with the EC, but those ties remained limited and typically worked to Yugoslavia's disadvantage.<sup>171</sup> EC's approach of "keeping Yugoslavia afloat" was a politically motivated strategy meant to entice Yugoslavia with near-Western standard of living—to maintain its dissociation from the Soviet sphere of influence by making it into a "dependent state."<sup>172</sup> Gradually, Yugoslavia came to be suspended between capitalism and socialism,

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<sup>170</sup> The organization that brought together Communist parties of Europe and cemented the Soviet Bloc into a firm existence after World War II.

<sup>171</sup> As political scientist Branislav Radelji suggests, trade agreements between Yugoslavia and the EC were protectionist and unfair to the Yugoslav side, often including clauses that allowed for agreements to be suspended in case of any perceived "threat" from Yugoslav imports to EC members' economies. Branislav Radelji, *Europe and the Collapse of Yugoslavia: The Role of Non-State Actors and European Diplomacy* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 58-60.

<sup>172</sup> Radelji, *Europe and the Collapse of Yugoslavia*, 66, 44.



between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, with neither bloc daring to court or act aggressively towards Yugoslavia for fear that such an action would prompt a reciprocal response from the other side. Ironically, this balance of threats provided Yugoslavia with a sense of security and predisposed it to become the founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement—its own bloc. Highly respected in the so-called Third World for its anti-imperialist and internationalist policies, Yugoslavia was valued by Western diplomats and often acted as a mediator in talks with Arab states who abhorred the West, especially the United States. It was precisely this status as a diplomatic link between East and West, and especially as a socialist country with only weak ties to the Soviet Union that “enabled Yugoslavia to enjoy significant economic help from the West.”<sup>173</sup>

Western economic assistance, however, proved to be a source of discord and came with strings attached. Initially, it was through financial aid and loans that the US plied Yugoslavia after 1948. In the 1960s, the country started borrowing from the IMF and World Bank in order to develop infrastructure, but the funds were often mismanaged, agreements on allocation proved difficult to arrive at, and some loans were never even used because of organizational and procedural problems.<sup>174</sup> Importantly, these funds were “conditional on the liberalization of the foreign trade regime and price regulations, conditional on the all-round improvement of investment project appraisal procedures.”<sup>175</sup> The global recession brought on by the 1973 oil crisis triggered a new wave of low interest IMF loans to countries dependent on oil imports. When interests rates suddenly increased, as per dictat of the US Federal Reserve Board in 1979,

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<sup>173</sup> Duško Sekuli , “The Creation and Dissolution of the Multinational State: the Case of Yugoslavia,” *Nations and Nationalism* 3, no. 2 (1997): 176.

<sup>174</sup> Dyker, *Yugoslavia*, 156-157.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

these countries, Yugoslavia chief among them, found themselves unable to make payments. Any further assistance was predicated on further economic reforms geared towards facilitating an entry into global capitalist market economy.<sup>176</sup> In order to stabilize the economy and manage the shocking amount of foreign debt in the early 1980s, Yugoslavia resorted to more IMF and other Western bank loans, acquired with great difficulty and with *very* unfavourable interest rates.<sup>177</sup> Soon, Yugoslavia found itself pressured into austerity measures by the IMF and Western diplomats which, in the language of economists, meant drastic reduction in consumption, increase in exports, and reduction of imports. In practical terms this meant water and electricity restrictions, rising prices of gas, food, and transportation, abandonment of essential social services and infrastructure projects, decline in wages, layoffs at unprofitable firms, inflation, and, most strikingly, shortages of food staples and other consumer goods.<sup>178</sup> The omnipresent tug of war between the forces of recentralization and decentralization found a new arena in the processes of application of austerity measures. The austerity measures should have facilitated a more centralized, easier to oversee economic system, but what happened was its further formalization, including legislations which put debt repayment under republican jurisdiction (and made for a very slow repayment pace) and paved the way for further decentralization.<sup>179</sup> In 1987,

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<sup>176</sup> For details, see Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1995), 47-81. The IMF's Structural Adjustment Programs stipulated that "indebted countries would only receive new loans on condition that they undertook a major 'restructuring' of their entire economies, based on the slashing of public sector-funded national development projects and social welfare measures. The aim was to open the entire world to the domination of the major industrial corporations and financial institutions." Not surprisingly, the beneficiaries of this strategy were to be found in the West: "It has been calculated that between 1984 and 1990 'developing' countries operating under SAPs transferred \$178 billion to Western commercial banks" Nick Beams, "IMF 'Shock Therapy' and the Recolonization of the Balkans," *World Socialist Web Site* (April 1999), <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/1999/04/imf-a17.html> (accessed August 25, 2013).

<sup>177</sup> Dyker, *Yugoslavia*, 122-124.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-154.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-122.

Yugoslavia was for the first time unable to meet its payments to the IMF and World Bank; disagreements over conditionality abounded until the relationship with the two financial entities started to collapse. Yugoslavia's sociopolitical picture became dismal: the middle class had all but disappeared, white collar crime (embezzlement, nepotism, graft) became rampant, nationalism and ethnic resentment started to boil over as inter-republican squabbles escalated, people mocked formerly holy socialist values and flocked back to religion, federal government became fragmented, divided between those advocating recentralization and those advocating further liberalization, and barely able to make decisions because of differing opinions on how to deal with the crisis.<sup>180</sup>

The hostilities between republics (and ethnic groups) worsened significantly during this period owing in part to some paradoxical past and current EC economic policies. The EC, in effect, prevented Yugoslavia from integrating into European economy as a single unit because it preferred trade with the more developed republics, Slovenia and Croatia, and so gave those republics an important leverage in internal Yugoslav rows pertaining to economy (as well as in general). This approach not only worked counter to the austerity measures, which encouraged a more centralized system, but also effectively welcomed parts of Yugoslavia into the European economic as well as cultural and geographic corpus while keeping other parts out. Not surprisingly, this dynamic facilitated internal discord. The EC's approach seemed a manifestation of Balkanism, a Western prejudice in some ways not unlike Orientalism, but different because, as Maria Todorova points out, "while orientalism is dealing with a difference between (imputed) types, balkanism treats the differences within one type."<sup>181</sup> Put differently,

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<sup>180</sup> For more on the economic reforms and austerity measures, see Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, 47-81.

<sup>181</sup> Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 19.

Balkanist prejudice located in Yugoslavia varying degrees of deviation from the Western ideal of Europeanness, diagnosed a severe innate cultural regression in some parts, and placed those parts in opposition to Western Europe—it imputed to those parts an inability to organize into an efficiently functioning economy.<sup>182</sup> Within this paradigm, Slovenia and Croatia tended to be seen as less “Balkan” than the rest of the country. This polarization (civilized west vs. backward east) was internalized in various ways by the Yugoslavs.<sup>183</sup> While most admitted to some “Balkanness,” all designated someone else as more Balkan and therefore more un-Western than themselves. As the Yugoslav economic crisis worsened, this shading of the country in degrees of “Balkanness” became more pronounced and greatly contributed to internal discord.

The conflict between the proponents of liberalization and proponents of recentralization, a dynamic with a Balkanist and therefore an ethnic dimension, deepened regionally-based economic divisions. From its inception, Yugoslavia was unevenly economically developed, with the west—Slovenia and to a lesser extent Croatia—being more developed than the rest of the country.<sup>184</sup> Having taken advantage of some fortunate historical circumstances, Slovenia became Yugoslavia’s most economically developed republic—and so gained an upper hand in political

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<sup>182</sup> As Andrew Hammond puts it, “[i]n creating a sense of distance between the two poles of Europe, the balkanist would be seen to blame economic and social crises on innate factors rather than on its entrance into a globalizing economy that had already left the Balkans far behind.” Hammond, “The Uses of Balkanism,” 617-618.

<sup>183</sup> As Maria Todorova suggests, “a negative self-perception hovers over the Balkans next to a strongly disapproving and disparaging outside perception” Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*. 38.

<sup>184</sup> For more on the regional imbalance in economic development, see Vesna Bojžić, “The Disintegration of Yugoslavia: Causes and Consequences of Dynamic Inefficiency in Semi-command Economies,” in *Yugoslavia and After: A Study in Fragmentation, Despair and Rebirth*, eds. David Dyker and Ivan Vejvoda (London: Longman, 1996), 40-44. This imbalance was also one that once again divided Yugoslavia into former Ottoman and former Habsburg lands by reaffirming the disparities, instituted while the future Yugoslav territories were under colonial rule, in infrastructure, literacy, and agricultural development. For instance, the “patterns of rural organization” in each empire were vastly different. Unlike the Ottoman, the Habsburg Empire left a legacy of cooperatives which continued to benefit and protect the farmers. In the formerly Ottoman lands, once the economic crisis struck, the farmers had to go deep in debt just to survive. For more, see Mieczysław P. Boduszyński, *Regime Change in the Yugoslav Successor States: Divergent Paths Towards a New Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 51-52.

matters—and a model to which to aspire, but the east never really caught up.<sup>185</sup> Eager to retain the privileged status and shed the burden of the less developed regions, the western republics advocated continued decentralization of the political system and liberalization of economy; perhaps hoping to benefit from the west's prosperity, the eastern republics tended to advocate recentralization. Slovenia and Croatia deeply resented the austerity measures which placed restrictions on foreign trade (they preferred to deal with Western European markets rather than with other Yugoslav republics). As the crisis deepened, the two republics fought ardently to reduce the federal input into how their economies are run—they felt it unreasonable to be expected to share their wealth with the rest of the country. Not surprisingly, polarization over the federal budget and legislation took on an ethnic dimension and initiated a series of constitutional crises. Yugoslavia's republics seem to be disengaging from one another under the pressure of the economic crisis. As Susan Woodward puts it, Yugoslavia's "legitimizing principles were eroding at the popular level" as the politicians, "in their responses to the economic crisis and bargaining over political elements of the economic reform, were picking apart the fundamental principles of the constitutional order of multinational Yugoslavia."<sup>186</sup> The romantic socialist ideal of "Brotherhood and Unity" was trumped by economically and politically realist concerns.

Yugoslavia's founding myths and foundational principles seemed to be unraveling in the grim 1980s. The very idea of the workers' self-management, a concept that at the best of times

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<sup>185</sup> Susan Woodward stresses that Slovenia's economic superiority had its roots in lucky historical circumstances. Slovenia saw little fighting or destruction in World War II; its industry operated continuously as it was solidly incorporated into the German one, and its territory was liberated by the Partisans early. Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*, 58. Woodward goes on to point out that Slovenia pursued "political self-government and local initiative," which went hand-in-hand with "regional economic self-sufficiency and thus autonomy in economic policy." Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*, 58-59. The destruction of both world wars was inflicted less on both Slovenia and Croatia, a circumstance which greatly impacted later development, and provided for major advantages relative to the rest of the country. See Boduszy ski, *Regime Change*, 53. Also, Woodward *Socialist Unemployment* 60-61.

<sup>186</sup> Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, 74.

found scarce practical application, seemed a sham. Even those who turned a blind eye to the system's imperfections in the past no longer bothered to pretend. It was apparent to everyone that it was not the workers or even their proxies, the workers' councils, but professional managerial teams who had full control over how business enterprises were run. Any potential for transforming the idealistic self-management system into a true participatory democracy was gone.<sup>187</sup> Rather unsurprisingly, Yugoslavia's experiment with market socialism also backfired. It normalized economic practices that would otherwise be unacceptably capitalist, and underlined class divisions by benefiting those with deeper pockets.<sup>188</sup> The economic crisis gradually all but disappeared the middle class, exposing the growing chasm between the standards of living of the politicians/managerial class and the rest. The country that at the best of times seemed to be stuck in a cycle of cosmetic reforms, continuously "perfecting" its socialist path and struggling to keep up its balancing act between socialism and capitalism, was now devoid of identity and lacking a common dream.

### The Struggle Within: Cinema of Austerity

In the 1970s, Yugoslav filmmaking entered a period of stagnation. Fewer films were produced in the 1970s than in the decade before, but more importantly, gone was the "thematic boldness and cinematic experimentation" of the 1960s as genre films like Partisan war films, comedies, and historical dramas filled the vacuum created by the demise of the *Black Wave*.<sup>189</sup> Yet by the early 1980s, Yugoslav filmmaking experienced a kind of revival, perhaps precisely

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<sup>187</sup> For more, see Dyker, *Yugoslavia*, 38. For further insight, see Zukin, *Beyond Marx and Tito*, 48-75.

<sup>188</sup> It resulted in "the sale of basic goods and services to those who could pay the most" instead of "the availability of goods and services of high quality at low prices," in "expansion in the form of monopolies, corporations, and trusts" instead of "support for the innovation and the expansion of successful producers," and in "personal enrichment" instead of "reward for individual initiative and skill." Zukin, *Beyond Marx and Tito*, 23.

<sup>189</sup> Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 143.

because of the alarming economic and constitutional crises which gave filmmakers thematic fodder (and kept politicians too busy to focus on censoring provocative filmmakers). By the 1980s, Yugoslavia's economic crisis was so severe it left the citizens stunned and struggling to navigate the austerity measures imposed on the state by foreign lenders. The shocking loss of the living standards and the resulting disillusionment with the state were impossible to ignore by any socially aware filmmaker. Daniel Goulding rightly observes that 1980s Yugoslav filmmakers did not "coalesce" around a set of "aesthetic tendencies or objectives," but also suggests that they explored overtly political themes rather broadly and concerned themselves primarily with "making professionally well-crafted films with dramatically interesting story lines, which communicate effectively with the contemporary audience."<sup>190</sup> I argue, however, that too many filmmakers did engage in an open and direct confrontation with the state and produced works which astutely examined its failures for the decade's filmmaking to be dismissed as apolitical or conformist.<sup>191</sup> Although lacking the spirit of formal experimentation and the anti-conservative drive which fueled the hip counter-culture youth appeal (now passé globally, anyway) of the *Black Wave*, many 1980s films dealt specifically with aberrations of the Yugoslav socialist system and in that respect stand on par with the films of the *Black Wave*. Put differently, these films dealt with Yugoslav socio-economic realities somewhat more ambiguously and less directly than the films of the *Black Wave* did.

This chapter is divided into two sections, each focusing on one particular tendency in the Yugoslav cinema of the late 1970s and 1980s, and each represented by three films. The first section focuses on three films depicting Yugoslavia's economic decline and the resulting

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<sup>190</sup> Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 147.

<sup>191</sup> Granted, this was much easier and less dangerous to do in the 1980s than it was in the 1960s.

disillusionment of the citizens with the state. The films rely on the conventions of the science fiction and horror film genres and employ the trope of disease to form allegorical depictions of a deeply unsettled, dysfunctional, increasingly neurotic and volatile society. Pointing the allegorical finger at Yugoslavia's political elite for their mismanagement of the country, *The Rat Saviour* (Krsto Papi , 1976) is a science fiction horror film about a destitute writer who discovers that a race of conniving shapeshifters has infiltrated the society. The shapeshifters maintain covert control of the society by spreading a disease that ensures the public's deference to their authority as they methodically drain the resources in order to maintain their opulent lifestyles. Oppressively dreary medical horror film, *Variola Vera* (Goran Markovi , 1982), deals with the true story of the 1972 outbreak of smallpox, contained after a strict quarantine was implemented at a Belgrade hospital at the urging of and with the assistance by the UN and WHO. The film, however, employs its depiction of the outbreak containment as an allegory for the Yugoslav economic crisis and the austerity measures implemented at the insistence of the IMF. An even bleaker reality is depicted in *Backbone* (Vlatko Gili , 1975), a funereal, understated psychological horror/dystopian science fiction film about a strange epidemic which grips the city of Belgrade, baffling the medical professionals. The mysterious disease which seems to induce in the infected an emotionally overwhelming existential crisis, eventually driving them to suicide, allegorizes the deep despair caused by the Yugoslav economic and political crises, especially the fear of an unknown and uncertain future.

All three films are political allegories which offer nightmarish visions of a society in a deep crisis. Employing the conventions and tropes of science fiction and/or horror genres, each film captures some of the more intangible qualities of the country's disposition during the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s. The films find their register in dread, anxiety, tension,



apprehension, panic, and dismay—the kinds of sentiments not conveyed by unemployment or inflation statistics, but keenly *felt* by Yugoslav citizens. The unifying thread of my discussion is the films’ evocation of the Freudian *uncanny*—the cognitive dissonance upon discovering the inherent paradoxes of something previously deemed fully known—in their characters who perceive that their society, although it still *appears* to be the same, is now in some difficult-to-define way also fundamentally different. My discussion of how the films utilize the trope of disease to convey this sentiment is ordered in a way that mirrors the progression of the Yugoslav economic crisis. Under the heading of “Greed,” I discuss *The Rat Saviour*, focusing on how the shapeshifters’ unscrupulous, shadowy conspiracy allegorizes the behavior—luxurious lifestyles and irresponsible borrowing—of Yugoslav political elites. I pay special attention to the shapeshifters’ mimicry/duality and to their ability to spread their ideology by infecting others as allegorical depictions of the disparity between of the Yugoslav elites’ empty promises of future prosperity for everyone and the consequences of going deeper into debt. Next, under the heading of “Fear,” I discuss the urban nightmare of *Backbone* whose mysterious, sublime disease which renders Belgraders paranoid, ridden with self-doubt, and pondering the paradoxes of human nature and the absurdity of existence allegorically suggests that Yugoslavia is a society in despair, debilitated by the fear of the future—of the inevitable consequences of the mounting foreign debt. Finally, under the heading of “Quarantine,” I discuss *Variola Vera* whose depiction of the smallpox outbreak, which not only necessitates an outside intervention, but also wakes up old animosities among the hospital staff, stands for the devastating austerity measures and symbolically suggests that the economic crisis has produced a society ostracized from the world and on the verge of collapse. I argue that however oblique or ambiguous the films’ allegories, they ultimately function as uniquely revelatory visions of Yugoslavia during the economic crisis.

The second section is centered on depictions of the plight of the working class men and women in a society in which they no longer have the mythical stature they once had. Živko Nikolić's drama, *In the Name of the People* (1987), revisits the most explosive and controversial political scandal of the 1960s, the alleged surveillance of the country's top politicians, orchestrated by the head of the UDBA (Yugoslavia's state security agency which emerged from the post-war OZNA), Aleksandar Ranković. The film uses the affair as a backdrop for a story less about Ranković or the 1960s and more about the ruinous state of the working class in the 1980s. In Nikolić's film, the working class man is a devalued commodity, aimless, lacking an identity, disrespected, and pushed around—a casualty of the machinations of the political elites. *The Dream about a Rose* (Zoran Tadić, 1986), a moody crime film inspired by the American noir tradition also depicts a hard working family man struggling to survive in a society in which the value system seems to have shifted without anyone notifying the working class. A genre film with a political message, *The Dream about a Rose* depicts a society in which shiftiness and duplicity are essential survival skills, racketeering and extortion are common, and distinctions between police and criminals increasingly blurred. Finally, the unclassifiable *Rams and Mammoths* (Filip Robar Dorin, 1985), one of the few works from this decade that would be at home within the *Black Wave* corpus of films (especially those of Dušan Makavejev), lays bare the devastating consequences of the economic crisis on the working class. The film alludes to the increasing disharmony within the Yugoslav federation—the tensions between the east and west resulting from regional disparities in economic development—as it examines the xenophobia and discrimination experienced in Slovenia by migrant workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I examine the films separately, focusing on their shared affinity for the subject of the working class stunned by a complete failure of the self-management system, adrift in a country

they no longer recognize, while also paying attention to the vastly divergent formal and stylistic approaches of each of the films. I discuss *Rams and Mammoths* as a study of a variant of Balkanism Milica Baki -Hayden calls “nesting Orientalism,” which combines cinéma vérité and direct cinema observational styles with Eisensteinian montage to provide an incisive commentary on the harsh social and political environment navigated by the migrant workers. I rely on Paul Schrader’s seminal essay, “Notes on Film Noir,” to discuss *The Dream about a Rose* as a film which uproots elements of the quintessentially American genre—the ominousness of the physical world at night, the fatalistic tendencies, the urban criminal milieu where violence and gun play are routine—to offer an astute commentary about the erosion of the status of the working class as one of the pillars of the Yugoslav socialist state. Finally, I discuss *In the Name of the People* as what Natalie Zemon Davis terms “a distillation of historical experience” which relies not on strict historical accuracy but rather reinvents the past in order to interpret the sociopolitical disposition of the era.<sup>192</sup> I focus on how the film’s microcosm, especially the ways characterization, symbolism, and analogy function to exposit a bitter historical truth: the workers have always been and remain dispensable parts of an inherently dehumanizing Kafkaesque system. The unifying thread in my discussions of these three formally and stylistically disparate, but thematically complementary films is the examination of how they depict the stupefying shock of Yugoslavia’s transition into a state unrecognizable to its working class.

In their assessment of the Yugoslavia of the late 1970s and 1980s, particularly the disastrous consequences of the country’s foray into the global economy, all six films display a consistent theme: the loss of the connotative meaning of Yugoslavia. The economic and political crises seemed to dissolve the last of that mythical, comforting socialist Yugoslav identity that

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<sup>192</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, “‘Any Resemblance to Persons Living or Dead’: Film and the Challenge of Authenticity,” in *The History on Film Reader*, ed. Marnie Hughes-Warrington (London: Routledge, 2009), 22.

was once synonymous with a just society. The six films discussed here depict Yugoslavs as deeply unsettled by the economic crisis, resentful of austerity measures, frustrated and angry at the continued mismanagement of the country by the political elites, and anxious because they are facing an uncertain future. In examining the cracks in the veneer of Yugoslav socialism, the six films expose an unpleasant truth: once on the path towards a just, progressive, humanist society, the country is now an alienating and chauvinistic one with naïve believers in the socialist ideals looking on as criminals, especially those within the state bureaucracy, thrive and the Yugoslav Dream dies amidst the agony of the economic crisis and austerity measures.

#### The Disease of Greed: *The Rat Saviour*

Set in an unnamed Mitteleuropean city plagued by poverty and unemployment in the early 20th century, Krsto Papi's *The Rat Saviour* is a disquieting allegory about Yugoslavia's 1970s descent into debt and deeper into economic crisis. Papi's fantasy horror follows Ivan Gajski, a destitute aspiring writer who assists Professor Bošković in his efforts to produce a serum effective against the race of rat-like shapeshifters who have covertly taken control of the society. Led by the eponymous Saviour, who is also the city's mayor, the shapeshifters appear upstanding citizens, but ruthlessly exploit others and secretly maintain luxurious lifestyles. They multiply and spread their influence by biting unsuspecting victims who then spawn obedient decoys. Following the Professor's death, Ivan manages to administer the serum to the Saviour who, with his dying breath, promises to return in the future. The sociopolitical dynamics of the film's restive city run by an expanding elite class driven by greed form an allegory for the Yugoslav society of the 1970s whose own politicians reveled in the privileges that accompanied power while plunging the country already in decline deeper into debt. Symbolizing the disparity between the promises of prosperity and the reality of debt crisis, Ivan finds himself estranged

from his environment when he realizes that most of his fellow citizens are shapeshifting decoys. Ivan's predicament is best described via Freud's notion of the *uncanny*—the sense of dissonance, dread and anxiety upon the discovery (or rediscovery) of the foreignness of something previously deemed familiar and comforting.<sup>193</sup> The film, however, invokes the *uncanny* in order to implicate the viewers by suggesting that they, too, are living above their means thanks to irresponsible borrowing. The glimpses of Zagreb landmarks like the St. Mark's Church and spoken references to the city's famous Flower Square make familiar the film's strange, unidentifiable city and, in turn, conjure up an eerie sensation not unlike the *uncanny*. In implying that the city *is* Zagreb—rather than some chimerical location—the film creates a vague awareness in the viewer that its story is a wake-up call meant for him/her.

In the film's most self-reflexive moment, Papi declares the ability of the film's allegory to mediate between the viewer and his/her sociopolitical environment. Hungry and desperate, Ivan stops by the dilapidated office of a potential publisher to inquire about the status of his manuscript titled *The Epidemic*. The publisher, unable to recall Ivan or his manuscript, tersely asks: "Can't you see what kind of situation we are in?" Ivan tries to freshen up the man's memory and summarizes the manuscript as "the novel about the disease that spreads rapidly throughout the city and acts as a metaphor for rampant spread of bureaucracy." Having recalled the story, the publisher insists the manuscript will never get published because "the spread of the epidemic is described unconvincingly." Defending his approach, Ivan argues that his manuscript is realistic in that it accurately allegorizes the society's problems. Ironically, as he rejects Ivan's reasoning, the publisher is dictating a letter to his secretary—to be forwarded to some bureaucratic body—detailing the deteriorating conditions of the building that houses his firm and

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<sup>193</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, trans. James Strachey, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 418-430.

asking for emergency funds for repairs. A mise en abyme nestled inside of and echoing the film's themes, *The Epidemic* is a pointed allegory about the "situation" within its own fictional context—a crumbling society whose resources are controlled and consumed by rapacious shapeshifters. That fictional society is itself an allegory, utilized by *The Rat Saviour* to portray its own context—Yugoslavia being mismanaged into economic ruin by its irresponsible leaders. The film effectively instructs the viewer how to read it, and by legitimizing the approach taken in *The Epidemic*, asserts that its own allegory is capable (perhaps better than traditional realism) of distilling and astutely assessing its sociopolitical context.

The shapeshifters stand for the Yugoslav politicians who worked to enrich themselves while maintaining the pretense that the state is not on the verge of economic collapse. The film stresses the disparity between the impact of the growing economic crisis on the elites and on ordinary people by juxtaposing Ivan's troubles with the comfortable lifestyle of the shapeshifters. Looking for a job, Ivan joins a crowd of people waiting outside an employment bureau and clamoring: "We have nothing to eat!" Although some in the crowd insist that "this can't go on," they are told there is no work and the police quickly disperse them.<sup>194</sup> During a speech in the city's square, the mayor tries to appease the citizens and assures them that he is working for their benefit and asks that they be patient because "after every rain, out comes the sun."<sup>195</sup> It soon becomes clear that the mayor's optimism is a ruse. When Ivan's landlady kicks

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<sup>194</sup> Papi makes sure the viewer understands that unemployment is a long-standing problem in the film's allegorical city. When Ivan tries to reason with the bureau director, the man tersely responds: "I keep telling you there is nothing. We're in a crisis for God's sake. Wait until things get better."

<sup>195</sup> The mayor wants the citizens to be hopeful, but also realistic because "we are in a great economic crisis which encompasses not just our country but entire Europe." The mayor's speech replicates almost verbatim the speeches by Yugoslav politicians who often used the word "crisis" ambiguously to imply that the country's bleak economic outlook is not their fault but rather a symptom of the broader European economic depression. Even the less cynical viewer likely recognized the mayor's speech as a reference to Yugoslav politicians' efforts to evade responsibility for the state of the economy and to appease the citizens.

him out of his room for failing to pay the rent, he is forced to sleep on a park bench. On his first night in the park, Ivan is awoken by the sound of a waltz coming from a nearby building.

Perplexed, he rises and listens to the clinking of champagne glasses while observing through the window blinds the silhouettes of the shapeshifters swaying to the music. The kindly park warden takes Ivan to the abandoned Central Bank where he can sleep for a night or two without getting arrested for vagrancy. Exploring the spooky building, Ivan comes across a hidden stockpile of food and, hardly believing his luck, gorges on bread and sausages. Investigating further, however, Ivan finds the shapeshifters, copulating, drinking, and feasting on delicacies in the building's banquet hall. The abandoned bank building containing a stockpile of food secretly consumed by the shapeshifters symbolizes, of course, the ruinous Yugoslav economy and its last resources being recklessly siphoned off by greedy politicians. The film symbolically suggests that the economic crisis is getting progressively worse in part because the politicians drain the financial reserves in order to enjoy lavish lifestyles while ordinary citizens truly suffer the consequences of the crisis.

As Ivan observes from the shadows the bacchanalian celebration inside the abandoned bank building, a mysterious figure enters to cheers of "Salute the Saviour!" Because he cannot see the man's face, Ivan does not realize he is looking at the city's mayor, but he is terrified of the speech given by the ominous figure. The Saviour assures his minions that they are a specially-bred class which must always remember to behave without compassion or risk losing their privileges and asserts that "our mission is becoming a reality...many are joining our ranks...our enemies are disappearing." The shapeshifters who enjoy privileges ordinary people can only dream of seem partly modelled on the New Class described by Milovan Djilas in 1957 as a tightly-knit, bent on self-preservation, bureaucratic/managerial class which treated state

property as its own and methodically curbed challenges to its privileged status.<sup>196</sup> Djilas revisits the subject in 1969 to suggest that the New Class had evolved into a “new new class,” a broader and growing middle class consisting of well-educated professionals, “*specialists* of all kinds,” who possess far greater consumer power than the rest of the citizens.<sup>197</sup> More broadly then, the constantly recruiting, well-heeled shapeshifters can be said to represent this rapidly expanding middle class, no less bent on self-preservation, and willfully ignoring the economic crisis while maintaining comfortable lifestyles. The disease the shapeshifters spread proliferates not just greed and thirst for privileges, but also conformism and obedience and therefore allegorizes particularly well the bonds that unite the “new new class.” Those infected seem to instantly understand that no matter where they are in the hierarchy, the benefits of being a shapeshifter are too attractive to refuse and must therefore be protected at all cost.

The film depicts the shapeshifters as difficult to identify, well integrated into the system (their leader is a state official), aggressively protective of their status and interests (they patrol the city in Gestapo-style Mercedes cars and vanish their enemies under the cover of night with impunity), and actively expanding. That the shapeshifters’ disease is not exclusive but threatens everyone in the anonymous yet strangely familiar city implies that a similar dynamic functions in reality: *all* of Yugoslavia is frenziedly feeding on foreign loans, recklessly ignoring future consequences. The Saviour, the film’s “daemonic agent” whose villainous, iconic persona holds most of the film’s allegorical power, appears to be a simple public servant while orchestrating a campaign of voracious consumption for his cohorts.<sup>198</sup> The revelation of his duality—and that of

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<sup>196</sup> Djilas, *The New Class*, 62-69.

<sup>197</sup> Milovan Djilas, *The Unperfect Society: Beyond the New Class*, trans Dorian Cooke (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1969), 205.

<sup>198</sup> For more on the notion of “daemonic agent,” see Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (1963; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 25-69.



his minions—comprise the film’s “allegorical moment” which establishes the connection between the film’s admittedly preposterous story and reality and so forces a startling recognition of the film’s allegorical implications.<sup>199</sup> After finally realizing that the mayor *is* the Saviour, Ivan becomes determined to reveal the truth to others. Carrying several bottles of Professor Boškovič’s serum, he chases the mayor through the city streets. Every time he throws a bottle at the mayor and misses, the spraying serum reveals the rat-like features—elongated two front teeth, twitching noses, whiskers—of the passersby who happen to be shapeshifters. To the utter amazement of their uninfected friends, the shapeshifters collapse and die writhing in agony. The film’s “allegorical moment” crescendos when the Saviour suffers the same fate after Ivan finally catches up with him. For the uninfected citizens witnessing the revelations of their friends’ and neighbours’ true identities, the experience is somewhat like the *uncanny*—the familiar has become alien. Arguably, however, the *uncanny* is experienced by the viewer as well because the “allegorical moment” implies that he/she only need look around to see the truth: Yugoslavia is an economically unsustainable society, propped up by foreign loans, and blindly barreling towards a ruinous end.

Ultimately, the allegory of *The Rat Saviour* functions to unsettle and agitate the viewer. It “translates” the sociopolitical environment via its ludicrous story about rat-like shapeshifters who have covertly taken over the society to suggest to the viewer that the economic stability of the country is a self-delusion. The depiction of the shapeshifters as a clandestine society which

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<sup>199</sup> I borrow the term “allegorical moment” from horror film scholar Adam Lowenstein who, in his discussion of the Canadian Vietnam War-themed film, *Deathdream* (Bob Clark, 1974), describes the image of the main character, Andy Brooks, a Vietnam vet, neither dead nor alive, trying to bury himself in a shallow grave, as an “allegorical moment,” encapsulating the trauma of the Vietnam War uniquely effectively. He describes the image as one “where film, spectator, and history compete and collaborate to produce forms of knowing not easily described by conventional delineations of bodily space and historical time.” Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 2.

methodically drains the already suffering economy of a country deep in debt, may seem at first a condemnation of Yugoslavia political elites, but the film's critique is sweeping. The disease that the shapeshifters spread by biting those they deem potentially like-minded stands for the *general* disregard of the consequences of irresponsible borrowing. The film's allegory aims to alert the viewer that the country is being driven into economic ruin by likening his/her comfortable middle class life to an orgy of unrestrained consumption. Ivan's realization that the rapacious shapeshifters are *everywhere* and deeply integrated into the society, suggests that the film's allegory applies to most of the society—the shapeshifters stand for *all* who are obviously enjoying the perks of the middle class life financed by foreign loans.

#### The Disease of Fear: *Backbone*

Best classified as dystopian science fiction, Vlatko Gili's *Backbone* begins with an epigraph that describes the time as “a year which may come sooner than we dare to believe,” and the place as “a city we built using our imagination” yet “never dared to accept as possible.” Although the cryptic epigraph muddies the film's historical specificity, the film's setting—a typical Belgrade block of flats—unambiguously positions the film as an allegory for Yugoslavia's bleak prospects in the 1970s. The film centers on Pavle, a microbiologist trying to determine the source of the mysterious odour that pervades the city and appears to harbour a disease that makes the citizens anxious and despondent, eventually driving them to suicide. Using a makeshift lab inside his apartment, Pavle tries to identify the disease by finding commonalities in the bloodwork of the suicide victims. Unsettled by the inescapable odour and bewildered by rumours, his fellow tenants gradually turn on each other; they roam the building aimlessly and, retreating into solipsistic despair, cling onto faint memories of better times. Mystified by the strange disease and grief-stricken over the death of his lover, Pavle commits

suicide at the end of the film. Populated by the antagonistic and paranoid tenants who suddenly become unrecognizable to themselves and to each other, the building allegorizes Yugoslavia as it mutated—under the strain of the economic crisis—into a community of alienated and hostile citizens. As its epigraph hints, the film prophesizes the end of the Yugoslav socialist utopia, with the sublime disease standing for the economic crisis which so demoralized the Yugoslav society that it facilitated a swift substitution of the lofty ideals of socialist solidarity upon which the country was built with angst, pessimism and self-interest.

*Backbone* depicts the mythology of wartime heroism—so often utilized to remind the Yugoslavs to steadfastly pursue the socialist course out of respect for the sacrifices made in the past—as devoid of its original meaning. Pavle's apartment is decorated with iconic images of two Yugoslav national heroes. The enlarged photographs show two Partisans moments before their deaths: Stjepan Filipovi , seconds before he was hanged by the Germans as he shouted, "Death to Fascism! Freedom to the People!", and Edvard Kardelj , who calmly smiled and proclaimed, "Long Live the Glorious Communist Party!" moments before he was executed by a Chetnik firing squad. These apocryphal stories of defiance in the face of death were part of Yugoslav socialist lore, related methodically to post-war generations as examples of unmatched heroism to which they owed their freedom. As commodified artifacts of postmodern nostalgia used as interior decoration, the photographs are implicitly post-socialist. As such, they provide an ironic background to Pavle's frantic struggle to identify the mysterious disease: his efforts are futile—it is already too late. The dystopian context further strips the photographs of their original mythology. Displayed on the wall of Pavle's apartment, the photographs acquire an unintended meaning—they simply depict two men seconds before their deaths—and therefore perform an unintended function which is to foreshadow Pavle's (and the country's) demise. Ultimately, the

photographs stress the irony of heroes (real or invented) dying with defiant gestures only for Yugoslavia to fail because, as the film's epigraph suggests, no one believed it truly "possible."

The pervasive odour that overpowers Belgrade and brings with it an inexplicable dread and eventually death by suicide, allegorizes the chief effect of the economic crisis on Yugoslavia: loss of hope for the future and the resulting internal discord. Paralleling the anxiety most Yugoslavs experienced in the 1970s upon realization that the country they thought economically stable is alarmingly weak, *Backbone* depicts Pavle and his neighbours experiencing extreme anxiety upon sensing the odour. Because its source is unknown, the odour is an "empty signifier"—a sign without a signified and therefore without an agreed upon symbolic value.<sup>200</sup> Because they do not know from where it originates, the tenants speculate frenziedly on the odour's meaning, driving themselves to hysteria. That the authorities keep the public in the dark about the source of the odour only exacerbates the tenants' anxiety and makes them suspicious of the state. The patronizing television announcements ask the citizens to "stay at home and not open the windows," to use air fresheners, and wait for the wind to take care of the rest. Trapped in their flats, lacking any insight into the source and nature of the mysterious odour, unsettled by wild rumours, the tenants experience the *uncanny*—they all seem to perceive some intangible, but alarming change in themselves and in each other. Soon, they cease to be a community and become a collection of individuals who view each other with suspicion. They quickly grow aloof, cold-hearted, and aggressive. When one neighbour's dog howls too loudly, another one decides to "take care of the pooch," and strangles it with apparent glee. Those tenants looking for comfort find no sympathy. Pavle's next door neighbour, Pepi, begs others to

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<sup>200</sup> Media scholar and semiotician Daniel Chandler points out: "Such signifiers mean different things to different people: they may stand for many or even any signifieds; they may mean whatever their interpreters want them to mean." Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 74.

keep him company. Although Pavle reluctantly agrees to let him stay in his apartment, Pepi leaves, sensing that he is not actually welcome, and commits suicide by jumping off his balcony. Pepi's unallayable fear mirrors the anxiety of many Yugoslavs in the 1970s, but the inability of others to empathize with Pepi implies that the Yugoslav society is no longer one of solidarity and comradeship but one of antagonism and self-interest. Pavle's own indifference to Pepi is ironic given his obsession with identifying the disease and finding its source. Had Pavle truly listened to Pepi's pleas for comfort, he would have seen what no lab test can show him: the disease is simply a fear of an uncertain future.

*Backbone* utilizes the symbolism of the myth of the Garden of Eden to suggest that this rejection of socialist solidarity—the substitution of community with individualism—is a grave mistake likely to have catastrophic results. The mysterious odour triggers in Pavle a ghoulish childhood memory of a man who had murdered his wife and burned her body in a furnace, causing the neighbourhood to be overpowered by the smell of burning human flesh. The association leads Pavle to speculate that the odour may be coming from the nearby crematorium. The facility's director, a mysterious elderly figure, brushes off Pavle's pleas for the crematorium to stop operating. When a body is rolled in on a gurney, the man dutifully writes down the tag information into his log book and, as the body burns in the cremation oven, tells Pavle: "That is what the earth will look like one day when the chariots of fire pass through." As Pavle fidgets nervously, the crematorium director assures Pavle that there is no cause for panic and cryptically opines that fire merely purifies. As he reassures him, the crematorium director keeps handing apples, one by one, to the perplexed Pavle who struggles to hold onto the fruit. The only character in the film unaffected by the odour, the crematorium director is a personification of the more authoritative, moralistic and fearsome aspects of the Christian mythology: the myth of the

Garden of Eden and the interventionist, vindictive God whose punishment cannot be escaped. As the body continues to burn in the cremation oven, the man overwhelms Pavle with “forbidden fruit,” symbolically suggesting that sins have been committed and that sinners are being “purified” by fire. Ironically then, the overpowering odour appears to be produced by the burning bodies of the citizens themselves. Not just an “empty signifier,” but an indexical sign, the odour is the result of ongoing administration of punishment for the sin of destroying the Yugoslav socialist “paradise.” The odour instills fear in the remaining citizens and inspires more antagonism and discord, symbolically suggesting that instead of an Edenic future, a perpetual hell awaits Yugoslavia.

Vlatko Gili ’s *Backbone* suggests that the economic crisis of the 1970s had somehow eroded the psychological integrity of the citizens and, in turn, fundamentally altered Yugoslavia’s identity. That change might have been difficult to define, and to experience it might have felt somewhat like the *uncanny*—a vague sense of dread that the country was now *somehow* different. The strange odour creates a sense of dissonance and displacement among the citizens of Belgrade precisely because they do *not* know what it means. The film’s allegory employs this uncertainty, which quickly transforms into aggression, to suggest that as the hope for a better future is being extinguished, the Yugoslav society is becoming less nurturing and more cutthroat. Worse yet, by depicting the foundational myths of Yugoslav socialism as having no meaning symbolically suggests that Yugoslavia is now hardly a socialist country. The mutually causal odour and suicides symbolize the economic crisis—the comeuppance for entering into the global capitalist economy, for mismanaging the country’s economy and going deep into debt, and, in effect, betraying the most fundamental socialist principles. Ultimately, the film’s apocalyptic allegory implies that the future of Yugoslavia is grim. By depicting Pavle and

his neighbours as insular and hostile to each other, *Backbone* predicts the country's gradual transformation from a unified community into a collection of antagonistic sub-communities, soon to be in conflict.

#### The Quarantine: *Variola Vera*

Goran Markovič's atmospheric horror, *Variola Vera*, takes place in a Belgrade hospital quarantined during an outbreak of the smallpox (*Variola Vera* in Latin). As panicked state authorities scramble to contain the disease by enlisting the help of the UN and WHO, professional and interpersonal relationships among the hospital staff quickly deteriorate, sending the hospital into chaos. Although the outbreak is ultimately contained and the quarantine lifted, the film's somewhat ambiguous ending implies that the disease has not been dealt with thoroughly and therefore remains a dormant threat. Although based on a true event—the 1972 outbreak of the smallpox in parts of the country—*Variola Vera* functions as an allegorical depiction of Yugoslavia severely destabilized by the economic crisis. The outbreak allegorizes the seemingly uncontrollable economic crisis while the quarantine stands for the austerity measures—the punitive and corrective action implemented after Yugoslavia became unable to make loan payments. The involvement of the UN and WHO represents the meddling into Yugoslav economy by holders of the Yugoslav debt like the World Bank and IMF who insisted on the austerity measures. Allegorizing the manner in which the austerity measures unsettled the country—exacerbated the political and constitutional crises, and promoted internal discord—the quarantine causes festering resentments, old rivalries and antagonisms among the hospital staff to blow up into open hostility while shameless self-interest comes out in full display. Much like Yugoslavia's unity and stability were eroded by the debt crisis and the austerity measures, the film's quarantined hospital is brought to the verge of collapse by the outbreak of smallpox.

Within the first few minutes, *Variola Vera* spells out its view that Yugoslavia is fractured and dysfunctional, and its leadership to blame for first creating and then exacerbating the economic crisis by attempting to alleviate it with short term fixes like unfavourable foreign loans. Shortly before the outbreak begins, the hospital heating system keeps breaking down and it is up to the overworked furnace maintenance worker, Mile, to fix it. The moment one leaky radiator is patched, another one starts gushing steam, prompting Mile to angrily exclaim: “Everything in this hospital has gone to hell!” The state of disrepair of the hospital which symbolizes Yugoslavia’s own economic (and otherwise) fragility goes beyond leaky radiators to include lackadaisical hospital staff not up to the task of dealing with a serious crisis. Because of a bureaucratic error, the hospital is unprepared to receive the still undiagnosed patient zero, Redžepi. The barely conscious Redžepi is left slumped over in a chair in the hospital lobby and is soon roaming hospital hallways, spreading the disease. Once Redžepi is officially admitted, he remains undiagnosed, causing the disease to spread even further. Dr. Grujić, a nonchalant womanizer, is in no rush to examine the new patient when urged to do so by his female colleague, Dr. Uskoković. The hospital director, Cole, eventually misdiagnoses Redžepi as having had an allergic reaction to penicillin. Redžepi’s case of smallpox remains undiscovered and untreated for far too long, making an outbreak inevitable. The film’s allegory suggests that Yugoslavia, like the hospital, “has gone to hell”—the unprofessionalism that allows the disease to spread stands for the incompetence of the Yugoslav leadership which ultimately led to the austerity measures.

Once Redžepi is diagnosed, the authorities scramble to formulate a response to the outbreak. The film’s depiction of this response is a thinly veiled allusion to the ability of the political elites to eschew the effects of austerity measures while ordinary citizens suffered. As



the Minister of Health announces that Redžepi does indeed have smallpox, he fidgets nervously and wipes his hands as if to cleanse them of the disease (and of the whole unpleasant matter). After getting promptly vaccinated, he and other politicians leave the emergency meeting in a hurry in their luxury Mercedes cars. The young expert in charge, Jovanovi , quickly orders the hospital quarantined and establishes a full information blockade in order to prevent “panic” which could play into the hands of “the enemies of the country and of our self-management system.” The police and special medical personnel quickly move into the area and establish a perimeter around the hospital; the patients, nurses and doctors are assured by the authorities that there is no cause for concern. The film’s depiction of the quarantine implementation at the hospital whose staff and patients are about to suffer through a prolonged isolation while those outside remain unaffected analogizes the way ordinary Yugoslavs were appeased while being “sacrificed” to austerity by the political elites who largely escaped its consequences.

The film’s depiction of the acrimony and, ironically, lack of compassion among the hospital staff allegorizes the inter-republican and regional divisions inflamed by the austerity measures as well as the callous and apathetic attitudes of citizens who had to aggressively compete for the available resources. After the hospital is given an insufficient supply of Gamma Globulin, an immune system-boasting vaccine, the hospital director, Cole, hoards the supply in his office and injects himself (unnecessarily) repeatedly while leaving others, even children, without.<sup>201</sup> The fear of being infected eventually renders Cole so paranoid that he locks himself in his office and refuses any contact with others. Cole’s selfishness is a reference to the stockpiling and price gouging that resulted from shortages of basic staples during the austerity years. Cole’s abdication of his responsibilities as a leader fosters disorder and confusion within

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<sup>201</sup> Cole is not the only one to display such behaviour. One of the nurses steals morphine from hospital supplies in order to feed her own addiction.

the hospital to allude to the inter-republican squabbles over how to deal with austerity measures which severely destabilized the country and produced a series of constitutional crises. Markovi makes it clear that the Gamma Globulin vaccines are imported from abroad, making them a symbol of foreign loans on which Yugoslavia depended, and so suggesting that those loans are the catalyst for the discord. Leaderless, the hospital soon descends into chaos as old grudges among the staff turn into new animosities. Symbolizing the country's gradual splintering, the hospital becomes divided between those who have come into contact with the infected and those who have not, with floors designated accordingly and cordoned off. By depicting the quarantined hospital as brought to the brink of collapse by the smallpox outbreak, *Variola Vera* symbolically suggests that the defeatism and discord that austerity measures generated are taking the country towards its demise.

The tensions among the hospital staff allegorize the Yugoslav ongoing identity crisis caused by the ultimately doomed efforts to reconcile the entry into global capitalist economy with ideals of socialism. Not surprisingly, this identity crisis peaked in the 1980s when citizen discontent over the austerity measures seemed to translate into a pervasive tendency to re-examine and reassess the country's foundational myths established in World War II. Markovi focuses on the friction between Cole and Dr. Irić which, the film hints, has gone on for decades, but whose source has always remained a mystery. As Cole's paranoia sets in, he clashes with Dr. Irić who reveals that Cole has a history of dastardly behaviour: he collaborated with the Nazis (under torture) during the war which resulted in deaths of many of Dr. Irić's comrades. When the womanizing Dr. Grujić succumbs to his own demons, he gets drunk and stumbles around the hospital cynically singing old Partisan songs. He bangs on Cole's office door and refers to the cowardly hospital director as a "sado-Marxist." Dr. Grujić's droll label for

Cole symbolically sums up the country's predicament: Yugoslavia was being "disciplined" by the West through a painful and humiliating intervention into its economy. When Cole finally comes out of his office to wash, he is almost lynched by the staff and patients who wheel him through the hallways on a gurney in a scene straight out of a slapstick comedy routine. He is cast out of the hospital and taken away by the police like a common criminal. The film depicts Cole as an imposturous authority figure mocked for being too cowardly to deal with a serious crisis. This depiction symbolically hints that even the myths of the glorious revolutionary struggle were viewed with cynicism as a direct result of dissatisfaction with incompetent leadership which, having led the country into an economic crisis, was losing its political credibility.

The involvement by the UN and WHO in the efforts to contain the outbreak symbolically represents the inherently condescending "disciplining" of Yugoslavia by the World Bank and IMF via the imposition of tough austerity measures. At the request of the Yugoslav authorities, the UN and WHO send an expert epidemiologist to Belgrade who tellingly sees the outbreak as an archaic outburst of the primitive: "smallpox has been eradicated; no one concerns themselves with it anymore." These words allude to the Western fear of and a presumption of backwardness of socialist societies. Markovi's emphasis throughout the film on the meticulous procedure of disposal of the bodies of the deceased symbolically suggests that the main purpose of the austerity was to prevent a "diseased" socialist economy from spreading to the West. The bodies are wrapped in disinfectant-soaked sheets, placed into coffins which are welded shut before being taken away. As the bedsheets and other objects the infected have come into contact with are burned after the quarantine is lifted, someone pulls out of the fire a flute—one of the few possessions Redžepi had with him when he was admitted to the hospital. The film concludes with Jovanovi smugly taking in the praise from the WHO for his efforts in "stopping a

dangerous disease on the very edge of Europe” while holding in his hands Redžepi’s flute. The film’s ironic (and open) ending symbolically implies that despite its attempts at compliance, Yugoslavia is unlikely to fulfill the Western directive to reform its economy. In Jovanovič’s hands, Redžepi’s flute becomes an ominous symbol of Yugoslavia’s uncertain future.

The harrowing allegory of *Variola Vera* mirrors the dynamics of Yugoslavia’s descent into instability in the 1980s when the failed attempts to integrate into global capitalist economy, necessitated in part by the bullish Western drive to reform Yugoslavia via austerity measures, finally took its toll. The atmosphere of enmity inside the hospital alludes to the general disillusionment and increasing internal divisions exacerbated by the austerity. The hellish hospital quarantine allegorizes particularly pointedly the ineptitude of the Yugoslav leaders and their disregard for the hardships experienced by ordinary citizens through the depiction of the hospital’s inability to deal with the smallpox outbreak because of a lack of professionalism and an absence of genuine concern for the well-being of the patients among the staff. Ultimately, the film’s allegory indicts the Yugoslav leaders for failing to anticipate that the country’s inability to repay high-interested loans would result in punitive measures which, in turn, would lead to a drastic loss of the standard of living for most of the citizens, cause internal friction, and put the country on the road towards its ultimate demise.<sup>202</sup>

Dispossessed: *In the Name of the People*

The Yugoslav self-management system was conceptualized shortly after Tito’s break with Stalin as an answer to the question of why “Stalinism was bad and Yugoslavia was

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<sup>202</sup> Worth noting is the film’s “inadvertent” allusion to the looming Kosovo problem which worsened in unison with the economic crisis. Patient zero, Redžepi, is a Kosovo Albanian who contracts smallpox while on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Remarkable because it is entirely factual, this element of the film’s story could not more pointedly hint at the Serbian anxieties and paranoia about what they perceived as an encroachment on their territory by the Muslim Albanians.

good.”<sup>203</sup> It was to be an anti-bureaucratic framework within which “immediate producers, through free association, would themselves make the decisions regarding production and distribution.”<sup>204</sup> Getting the workers “to take command of the ownership of production and to become the real and not merely the proclaimed guide and monitor of the process of work, production, and decision-making,” however, was easier said than done.<sup>205</sup> Direct involvement of the workers in the decision-making process was often hampered by their lack of in-depth knowledge of the rather complicated system and, ironically, by the failure to follow the collectivist spirit of the concept meant to curb narrow self-interest. The Yugoslav system also allowed for the economy to be guided (to a degree) by the market forces and for managers to have substantial control over how the factories were run. Personal accountability of workers and managers for the financial liability of companies, however, was only vaguely defined and consequently almost completely absent in practice.<sup>206</sup> The difficulties with the self-management system made it the subject of scorn by both the forces of economic liberalization and overall decentralization who saw it as hopelessly inefficient and preferred a fully capitalist market economy model, and by the conservative forces which advocated recentralization and even a return to a Soviet-style state controlled economy. The 1966 fall of Aleksandar Ranković, the head of the UDBA and an ardent supporter of centralization and planned economy, following

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<sup>203</sup> Djilas, *The Unperfect Society*, 220.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Phillips and Ferfila, *The Rise and Fall*, 105.

<sup>206</sup> Firms were kept afloat by heavy borrowing; the managers were able to keep their positions secure (avoid being sacked by the workers) simply by keeping the wages high. Any grossly underperforming company was usually bailed out by the government. See Phillips and Ferfila, *The Rise and Fall*, 109.

allegations of spying on several major political figures, seemed to signal that the liberal trends were prevailing.<sup>207</sup>

This ongoing conflict between the liberal and conservative forces implied that the opposition between Titoism and Stalinism remained, however obliquely, a feature of the country's political life. *In the Name of the People* employs this opposition—the dichotomy between the Yugoslav and Soviet models, especially highlighted during the Ranković affair—as it examines the lives of ordinary workers navigating the labyrinthine self-management system as the political scandal unfolds far “above” them. The film takes place in a working class community in Montenegro in 1966 and revolves around Milutin, the guileless and unambitious personal driver for the manager of a prosperous factory. Milutin's life turns into a Kafkaesque nightmare when his boss, Todor, is falsely imprisoned by the crooked police chief Maksim, causing Milutin to lose his job, his wife and his home. Once the Ranković affair breaks out, it reverberates through the lower echelons of police structures and Maksim and his clique are exposed. As if by magic, Milutin's old life is restored, but he is driven to near madness when everyone around him pretends nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

Nikolić's film's examines the Ranković affair from a distance of two decades yet offers a comprehensive insight into the totality of the social and political climate surrounding the scandal by depicting one man's fate and experiences in the turmoil of a sudden ideological turn.

Discussing the “authenticity” of films dealing with historical topics, Natalie Zemon Davis suggests that “the credibility and genuine historicity” of such films is often propped up not by

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<sup>207</sup> John Lampe notes the correlation when he points out that until 1966, “Ranković's security apparatus could still exert central control that bears comparison to counterparts in the Soviet bloc,” but “the market mechanism was being welcomed as Ranković was abruptly forced out for abusing his special powers.” Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 265. Bogdan Denitch does as well when he makes the connection between Ranković's sacking and the process of decentralization: “The elimination of the political police as a force in the political system and economy has been followed by attempts to reach a new equilibrium between the republics and the federal center.” Denitch, *The Legitimation*, 129.

detailed reconstruction of the past (actual locations, exact nuances of behaviour and iconography, authentic period dress, everyday objects, furniture, or architecture) but by the ways sociopolitical dynamics of the past are reconstructed via associations created through characterization, symbolism or analogy.<sup>208</sup> This is precisely the approach taken by Nikolić in his attempt to capture the zeitgeist of the era. The apolitical, business-oriented Todor stands for the liberal Yugoslav model while Maksim, who runs a private jail whose inmates are made to work as labourers and who keeps under surveillance local officials whom he routinely blackmails, stands for the conservative Soviet model. Milutin's nightmarish experience then is indicative of the insignificance of the working class, symbolically tossed around by the tug-of-war between the liberal and conservative forces. Milutin's docility and naiveté—his faith that the system will not betray him—allude to the near-complete disenfranchisement of the Yugoslav working class whose members remain unfamiliar with the finer points of the system and therefore unable to take control of it and affect any change that would benefit them.

The microcosm of the small Montenegrin town stands for Yugoslavia as a society still run by hardline authoritarians who curb reforms, routinely abuse their power, and care little about the interests of the working class. The bullish behaviour and privileges enjoyed by Maksim and his chief collaborator, the mayor, epitomize the grip on power by conservative hardliners like Aleksandar Ranković.<sup>209</sup> When Maksim and the mayor decide to go fishing on the local lake, the entire area is blocked off by the police and locals are prevented from passing through because they might “scare the fish.” Maksim's and the mayor's actions mirror not just

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<sup>208</sup> Zemon Davis, “‘Any Resemblance to Persons Living or Dead’,” 17-20.

<sup>209</sup> Maksim's abuses of power closely mirror those of Ranković. It was alleged that Ranković had installed listening devices into telephones of many of the major figures in the Yugoslav leadership, that he worked to discredit any politicians critical of the UDBA, that he controlled black market influx of goods into the country, that he forced prisoners to work as free labourers building houses for the UDBA officials. See Glenny, *The Balkans*, 582.

Rankovi 's hardline policing methods, but also his opposition to liberalization of the economy. When Todor is recognized for his effective management of the local factory at a special ceremony, Maksim seethes with anger at the public acknowledgement of the success of the liberal economic model. Alluding to the conservative resistance to the country's gradual turn in the 1960s towards a Western-style economy, the film shows how staunch hardliners react when one enterprising individual—rather than the entire collective—is credited with bettering the community.<sup>210</sup>

Upon hearing Todor promise to the community a prosperous future, Maksim mutters: “Prosperity—the last thing I need.” As the children's choir sings about the glory of work and Todor announces his upcoming business trip to Kinshasa, “after which this city will turn a new page,” Maksim and the mayor begin to plot Todor's downfall. An anachronistic vestige of the brief Stalinist era, Maksim is rightfully afraid of becoming obsolete. Maksim's criminalization of Todor's “liberal” initiative is rooted in the fear that his hardline approach to policing that seeks to eliminate both actual and imagined ideological enemies would become more difficult, if not impossible to administer once “prosperity” and more liberal attitudes come.<sup>211</sup> While Todor is in Kinshasa, Maksim arrests Milutin at a local strip club on charges of deviance; as soon as Todor returns from Kinshasa with a lucrative contract, Maksim arrests him as well on charges of introducing Milutin to “foreign ways.” The phrasing of both charges is highly symbolic, conveying the conservative view that liberal reforms are but imported deviations from socialism.

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<sup>210</sup> Todor's success is a result of the kind of reform that tolerates individual managerial initiative—precisely the kind of dynamic Rankovi detested. Rankovi routinely curbed “practical moves towards reform, resulting in the continued stagnation of the economy,” and in erosion of the self-management system which sought new ways—even those somewhat counter to its spirit—to increase productivity and benefit the workers. Glenny, *The Balkans*, 581.

<sup>211</sup> Summarizing the conservatives' fear of liberalization, Maksim only half-jokingly tells the mayor that if it was up to him, there would be no pesky civilians at all, only the police.



*In the Name of the People* suggest that the state oppression has rendered the working class fractious, politically powerless, and, most strikingly, as susceptible to corruption as the politicians. The film depicts the working class men and women living in near-poverty, divided, and fearful of the state. The workers and their families live in decidedly “unsocialist” conditions in a decrepit shanty town. The shanty town is frequently raided by Maksim and his associates who arrest local men on fabricated charges and then coerce their wives into sex in exchange for the men’s prison privileges. In the film’s opening sequence, as Maksim’s men enter the shanty town, everyone scatters upon hearing the sound of the approaching motorcycles. The shanty town—a microcosm of Yugoslavia’s working class—accepts the gross abuse of authority by agents of the state. The working class has learned its “proper” place in the pecking order: rather than self-managing, it submits to being managed. Maksim expertly keeps the shanty town community internally divided. Everyone lives in fear of Maksim’s informants who possess special privileges. Milutin’s wife, Mira, routinely cuts in line for the communal bathroom without any objections from others because she is involved in Maksim’s blackmailing scheme and also works to gather information about Todor through Milutin.<sup>212</sup> The shrewd and pragmatic Mira often chastises Milutin for refusing to himself become Maksim’s informant because she understands that unscrupulous ambition is the only way to thrive.<sup>213</sup> Even the priest dutifully

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<sup>212</sup> Mira’s privileges depend on being able to smooth-talk the wives of falsely arrested men into sleeping with Maksim. When her neighbour Krstinja’s fiancé Radoje gets arrested, Mira promises to the girl that she would “take care of it.” Mira sends Krstinja, still a virgin and therefore special, to Maksim who rapes her. Implying a deeply ingrained culture of abuse of power, Maksim’s method of arrest-and-rape is condoned by his staff. Upon hearing Krstinja’s screams coming from Maksim’s office, the policemen outside order prisoners to sing in order to drown out the girl’s screams.

<sup>213</sup> Once Maksim decides to frame Todor, he insists Milutin report to him on his boss’ activities, but the ever-loyal Milutin still cannot bring himself to do it. Afraid of losing her privileges if her husband does not cooperate with Maksim, Mira concocts a truth serum meant to make Milutin answer pointedly asked questions in his sleep, but comically, and to Mira’s dismay, Milutin just mumbles incomprehensibly. Milutin’s virtues, of course, contrast, and therefore serve to highlight, the culture of corruption and dishonesty that pervades the whole of the society.

passes information to Maksim as to who celebrates religious holidays and baptizes their children in secret. The film implies that the working class—the supposed backbone of the Yugoslav society—possesses no political agency because it is manipulated and tightly controlled by the state which it implicitly fears.

Nikoli employs the motifs of family and home to suggest that rather than being in control, the working class is at the mercy of “reforms” initiated by the state. The repercussions of Todor’s demise quickly trickle down to Milutin. Todor’s wife, Marika, and their children end up on the street and must move in with Milutin and Mira.<sup>214</sup> Soon, Milutin has to switch jobs with Gavriilo, the driver of the septic tank cleaning cistern known in the shanty town as the “shit truck.” Gavriilo goads the dejected Milutin: “It is *our* time now.” The remark mockingly refers to the kind of cadre changes initiated by ideological adjustments from above which often adversely affected the working class. The moment Milutin’s white Mercedes is replaced with the “shit truck,” Mira’s privileges disappear, too. She is laughed away when she tries to cut in line at the communal bathroom. Having no use for her as Milutin’s wife, Maksim instructs Mira to move in with Gavriilo in order to gather information on the new factory manager. (When Mira tearfully pleads with Maksim, “Don’t I have a soul?”, he tersely tells her that even her soul works for the state.) After Mira leaves to move in with Gavriilo, Milutin and Marika are kicked out of the house by Maksim’s men. The two quickly build a new house, but Maksim sends a demolition crew to take it down. Upon seeing the empty lot, Milutin can only ask his neighbour in disbelief: “Did

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<sup>214</sup> Nikoli emphasizes that class divide very much exists in a supposedly classless society. Although decent people who seem to care for the community, Marika and Todor enjoy the benefits of being part of the managerial class. Their domestic life differs sharply from that of the workers: Marika spends her time teaching their children to play the piano while the maid does house work. In contrast, the workers’ children run around dirt roads, unwashed and in rags. Marika and the children get a taste of precisely this predicament when their house is taken away and they have to move in with Milutin and Mira. Nikoli shows just how deep the class divide is in the sequence in which Marika has to use the communal shower where other workers’ wives cruelly laugh at her on account of the irony inherent in the reversal of fortune she is experiencing.

not my house use to stand here?” The demolition of Milutin’s house symbolically suggests that socialist Yugoslavia—the “home” of the working class—has been dismantled.

The film’s third act explicitly refers to the fall of Rankovič and implies the existence of a culture of abuse of power within security structures, orchestrated by hardliners who simply adapted to the “reforms.” Nikolič focuses on Maksim’s panicked reaction when the news breaks that Rankovič is being forced into retirement following an investigation into allegations of widespread abuse of power, including wiretapping of state officials. Realizing that a purge is about to take place that will sweep others in the security apparatus suspected of abusing their powers, Maksim orders released all inmates held in his private jail, “even the husbands.”<sup>215</sup> Once again, everyone’s lives are turned upside down by “reforms,” yet the fear of authoritarian figures is so pervasive that almost no one in the community is willing to confront Maksim and the mayor. Having “forgotten” about the months he spent doing forced labour on Maksim’s pet construction projects, Todor gets his job, his wife and his house back. His “amnesia” spares him the public embarrassment, but it also exculpates the criminal duo and helps whitewash their crimes. At a welcome back ceremony at the factory, Todor simply tells the gathered workers that his long absence was caused by prolonged business negotiations in Kinshasa. Rushing to accommodate Todor’s sudden return, Maksim’s men drag the confused interim factory manager out of bed in the middle of the night and tell him that *he* is now “headed to Kinshasa.” Milutin, too, gets his job, his wife and his house back—the white Mercedes and Mira magically reappear in front of the house as if nothing unusual at all had happened.<sup>216</sup> Milutin, however, cannot

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<sup>215</sup> As the investigation picks up steam, the mayor distances himself from Maksim once it is revealed that he has been sleeping with Maksim’s wife, and that their romps have been captured on film—by Maksim’s own men. This bit of poetic justice is a reference to the bombastic but never substantiated rumour that Rankovič had bugged Tito’s bedroom.

<sup>216</sup> Even Krstinja and her fiancé Radoje are there, smiling as Mira reassures them: “Well, as you can see, I have got you two back together as promised.”

accept this “Edenic” ending and angrily insists that Todor admit he had been “in prison!” Todor, however, insists he was “in Kinshasa!” Driven to the edge of sanity by this collective willful amnesia, Milutin tries to strangle Todor and gets swiftly thrown out of the factory like a common criminal. In the film’s final shot, Milutin walks away from the factory gates a ruined man. The film’s devastatingly pessimistic ending, especially the farcical denial of justice and truth, suggests a persistent and tacitly condoned culture of criminal abuse of power that made a mockery of the workers’ self-management system.

Natalie Zemon Davis points out that a film can embody a historical period through “personalities and relationships” that are “informed by” the “values and sensibilities” of the time depicted.<sup>217</sup> The film’s depiction of the sociopolitical climate of the 1960s Yugoslavia is informed by precisely this method, yet it is germane not just to the 1960s but also to the film’s present—more than two decades after the events portrayed. Although Maksim’s and the mayor’s fear of Todor and his promises of “prosperity” analogizes the source of the conflict between the conservatives and liberals that boiled over in 1966, *In the Name of the People* is less about the Rankovi affair itself and more about the continuing erosion of the most important aspect of the Yugoslav Dream: the workers’ self-management system. The microcosm of the small-town Montenegro in Nikolić’s film stands for Yugoslavia as a thoroughly undemocratic society in which the corrupt political elites are the only agents of change. Only nominally in charge, the working class men and women are casualties of the ideological “reforms” instituted by the elites. By depicting Todor’s downfall and restoration as events outside of the control of the workers yet with repercussions for many of them, the film suggests that the working class is situated at the very bottom of the power hierarchy in a state supposedly governed by them. Ironically, the

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<sup>217</sup> Zemon Davis, “‘Any Resemblance to Persons Living or Dead,’” 21.

working class even mimics the behavior of the elites and maintains its own culture of corruption and greed. Working class solidarity is curtailed by backstabbing and maliciousness borne out of narrow minded self-interest and fear, ultimately preventing the working class from attaining political agency and affirmation. At its conclusion, the film explicitly points to the officially sanctioned disregard for justice which makes an incorruptible working man into a villain to be coldly discarded by the system, suggesting that for the working class, the Yugoslav Dream is little more than a nightmare of unfulfilled promises and wasted potential.

The Fourth Shift: *The Dream About a Rose*

Zoran Tadi 's *The Dream About a Rose* focuses on a foundry worker struggling to feed his family in the glum city of Zagreb in the 1980s. While walking home from work late at night, Valent comes across the immediate aftermath of a deal-gone-bad between smugglers of uninspected meat and their accomplice, the local butcher named Laci. Observed from the shadows by the butcher who had just gunned down two of the smugglers, Valent disappears into the night with a bag of money he found lying in the street, initiating his own harrowing ordeal. Pressured by the gangsters to deliver the money, Laci tries to tactfully approach the cautious Valent, but when Laci is arrested, Valent becomes the sole target of the criminals determined to recover the money. In the film's both redemptive and apocalyptic ending, Valent kills the gangsters after they threaten the safety of his family. Tadi 's combination of the stylistic idioms of the American film noir of the 1940s and 1950s and the theme of the working man's struggle for survival in Yugoslavia of the 1980s forms a scathing critique of a society that has lost its way. The post-World War II malaise, the spectral presence in and behind American film noir, is replaced here with the late Yugoslav blues—the economic crisis exacerbating the pervasive disillusionment in a dysfunctional society on the verge of collapse. Paul Schrader suggests that

film noir tends to feature characters whose troubles stand for those faced by individuals “returning to peacetime economy” to depict a society “less than worth fighting for.”<sup>218</sup> Similarly, in Tadi ’s film, the travails of Valent and his family serve to depict a major change faced by the working class: the disappearance of the special status it once (more-less) had. In Tadi ’s Yugo noir, the corruption of Yugoslavia’s socialist ideals has produced a nightmarish milieu in which those meant to be the pillar of the society trudge on in near-poverty, anxious about the future.

Paul Schrader points out that an essential film noir theme is “a fear of the future,” usually manifested through the main character’s alienation, insecurity, confused priorities, and self-doubt.<sup>219</sup> *The Dream About a Rose* conveys the same theme via its main character. Part of Valent’s routine is to stop by the butcher shop late at night on his way home from work and to masochistically ogle the cuts of meat he can no longer afford. This obsessive routine, focused on the eponymous veal steak, “the Rose,” highlights Valent’s inability to provide for his family.<sup>220</sup> Humbled by his circumstances, Valent is morose, abrupt, and cantankerous. “Prepare something without meat,” he suggests curtly when his wife, Ljuba, is unable to plan the next meal. Valent’s “solution” symbolically points to a future of hardship and deprivation. The family’s catastrophic financial situation has substituted harmony with pervasive anxiety about the future. Schrader suggests that the typical “noir hero dreads to look ahead, but instead tries to survive by the day, and if unsuccessful at that, he retreats to the past.”<sup>221</sup> Valent, too, is fearful of what lies ahead

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<sup>218</sup> Paul Schrader, “Notes on Film Noir,” in *Film Noir Reader*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., eds. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 1999), 55.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>220</sup> Like a proper noir character, Valent has a secret obsession; in a whimsical deviation from the film noir trope, it is not with a femme fatale but with a cut of meat bearing a woman’s name. That Valent’s “dates” with Rose are a nocturnal activity implies a degree shame associated with his obsession and, in turn, with his inability to be a provider.

<sup>221</sup> Schrader, “Notes on Film Noir,” 58.

and seems to occasionally default to the past because he cannot see a dignified way forward. When Ljuba tells him about a union drive to provide clothing at reduced prices to workers, Valent is hesitant to pursue the opportunity because accepting assistance is likely to make him feel ashamed and inadequate. Although hardly able to feed his family, Valent does not hesitate to lend money to a co-worker in dire need. Valent's desire to remain proud and generous even if at the expense of his family's well-being suggests that he has still not mentally crossed the chasm between the prosperous past and impoverished present. Valent's inability to adjust to the new reality causes him to be confused about his priorities and to make irrational decisions. Alienated from his family, Valent gradually steps into the archetypally noir, impossible-to-maintain state of duality in which an honest man begins to contemplate crime.

The physical environment of film noir typically consists of shadowy streets and dingy rooms with low ceilings where low-key lighting struggles to illuminate the main character as he makes his wrong move and then descends into a nightmare.<sup>222</sup> The urban nightmare of film noir gets its stylistic counterpart in *Rose*: Valent routinely walks the Zagreb streets at night and lives with his family in a dilapidated rented apartment where shadows and cigarette smoke obscure his dour face. As Paul Schrader points out, film noir characters are "often hidden in the realistic tableau of the city at night," creating a "fatalistic, hopeless mood."<sup>223</sup> Valent's walking route is a maze of corridors lit only by shop windows and nothing except the sound of his own footsteps distinguishes Valent from his surroundings. This darkness through which Valent walks symbolizes the new set of sociopolitical conditions within which he cannot remain himself. As most film noir characters must, Valent relinquishes control of his life to this overwhelming

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<sup>222</sup> For a succinct summary of the noir style, see Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir," 57-58.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. 57.

darkness which breeds criminality. As shots ring out in the night, a pistol—presumably discarded by Laci—slides out from the shadows and comes to a halt right in front of Valent. The pistol and the bag of money bait Valent and facilitate his descent into the nightmare. The moment he disappears into the darkness with both, Valent enters that harrowing state of duality typical of film noir characters: he is now an honest man *and* a criminal, innocent *and* guilty. Haunted by nightmares, Valent becomes increasingly paranoid. Schrader suggests that the stylistic exaggeration of film noir is utilized to depict inner turmoil and unstable psychological states, by “directing unnatural and expressionistic lighting onto realistic settings.”<sup>224</sup> Tadi externalizes Valent’s torment through typically film noir distortion of his everyday surroundings. Mysterious dark shadows seem to follow Valent and even the friendly neighbourhood policemen are now menacing figures lurking in the night. Valent’s guilt and paranoia transform the ordinary into menacing. His Zagreb neighbourhood becomes so antagonistic and oppressive that Valent starts carrying the pistol he found at the scene of the killings.

Defining the genre’s fatalistic mood in a single sentence, Al, the miserable protagonist of Edgar G. Ulmer’s *Detour* (1945), asserts: “Someday fate, or some mysterious force, can put the finger on you or me for no reason at all.” Although Al’s troubles with the law can ostensibly be blamed on fate or bad luck, Ulmer’s film—like most noirs—implies, however obliquely, that the hero’s misfortune is a result of some fundamental flaw of the society. Tadi is specific as to why Valent finds himself in the downward spiral of crime. Valent comes across the abandoned bag of money not by mere chance but because he *must* walk the streets at night—when criminals operate and honest people sleep—on his way home from the “fourth shift.” As he explains to the policeman who questions him about his nocturnal activities a few nights after the incident, the

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<sup>224</sup> Schrader, “Notes on Film Noir,” 56.



work at the foundry is so hard that the men are unable to last eight hours—they can only manage six and so must work in four six-hour shifts rather than in three eight-hour shifts. Valent's explanation implies that the Yugoslav socialist system is a travesty if a man who works *that* hard still cannot provide for his family. The failures of the state necessitate that Valent work extra hard and, in turn, facilitate his involvement in crime. The darkness finds Valent, not the other way around. Facing an uncertain future, Valent gives in to the lure of easy money. In *Rose*, the working class turns to crime because it has been betrayed by the socialist system.

In film noir, criminal guilt tends to be unstable and shifts from person to person until it settles on the vulnerable, naïve, unlucky, but usually innocent man.<sup>225</sup> Similarly, in *Rose*, the culpability for the murders of two smugglers and for the disappearance of the money becomes a matter of perspective. A few days after the incident, Valent walks into Laci's shop to purchase meat—something his meager pay has not allowed him to do in a long time. Fearing the smugglers' reprisal, Laci sees an opportunity to discreetly approach Valent and cryptically asks whether they had met before “under some unfortunate circumstances.” Valent is genuinely puzzled by Laci's question, yet, as if to admit guilt, changes his order and spends even more money. As he gets more concerned for his own safety, Laci's approaches become less cryptic until he finally shows up at Valent's door. Holding a bagful of “free of charge” meat as a token of good will, Laci begins to spell it out: “You know we are accomplices of sorts...I speak for the people to whom the money belongs.” Although he interrupts Laci and angrily dismisses his attempts to reach out— “I'm not sure about you, but I'm an honest man!”—Valent finally realizes that the butcher knows what happened that night. Critically, however, Laci proposes a

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<sup>225</sup> Filmmakers Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol discuss a variation of this trope, which they term “exchange of guilt,” in the context of Hitchcock's films in Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol, *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films*, trans. Stanley Hochman (1957; repr., Brighton: Roundhouse Publishing, 1992), 95.

different perspective which implies that the culpability for the nightmare they are both experiencing rests with neither of the two men. Laci tells Valent that the two of them are "on the same side" and assures him: "Those who are behind all this should be blamed. Those far away from you and me." Pointing to "The Valley of Flowers," the local bar from which the smugglers operate, Laci adds: "And far from those in there." Laci's stress on "those far away" unmistakably refers to the state itself, and "all this," to the catastrophic economic conditions in which working men must resort to crime to survive. Laci suggests that there should be solidarity between foundry workers and butchers *in opposition* to the degenerated socialist state, and implies that even gangsters are just symptoms of a broader societal dysfunction for which the state itself is culpable.<sup>226</sup> In *Rose*, the fluid nature of guilt serves as a metaphor for the radical changes in the Yugoslav society which obscure distinctions between right and wrong. What is ultimately criminal then is the state's betrayal of socialist ideals which has produced a new Yugoslav reality in which gangsters thrive while honest men work "the fourth shift."

This abominable inversion of socialist values eventually drives Valent to violently lash out at the gangsters in the film's apocalyptic ending. First, he gets drunk with a friend at "The Valley of Flowers" and loudly denounces the gangsters, sitting nearby, who "see more money at the poker table in one night than both of us have seen in our lives!" The gangsters promptly throw the stumbling-drunk Valent out into the cold night. The next day, defiant Valent goes to Laci's shop and buys five pounds of veal steak, causing other customers to stare in shock at his ability to afford such a purchase. That evening, the family dinner is a feast; the kids gorge, Ljuba grins, and Valent observes them all as he puffs on a cigarette. Irritated by his insolence, the

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<sup>226</sup> The corruption of socialist ideals is further implied when Valent recognizes the police inspector investigating the murders as a regular at "The Valley of Flowers," where he cavorts with the smugglers. As is typical for the world of film noir, no clear-cut distinction separates those who break the law and those who serve it.

gangsters take Valent to “The Valley of Flowers” where they rough him up and threaten to hurt his family if does not give the money back. In a fit of rage, Valent shoots the gangsters with the pistol Laci slid in front of his feet the night their paths crossed and silently walks away.

Somewhat prophetically, the film’s ending suggests that a fundamentally unjust society is unsustainable and is likely to soon reach a breaking point and violently collapse.

The typically film noir “mood of cynicism, pessimism, and darkness” finds its equivalent in *The Dream About a Rose*, but with the genre’s specifically American sociopolitical concerns replaced with corresponding ones from the Yugoslav context.<sup>227</sup> Valent’s nightmare is a direct result of his drastically diminished economic status and is therefore symptomatic of the predicament of majority of the working class Yugoslavs who struggled in the 1980s to make ends meet. The quintessential film noir themes like detachment, psychic disintegration, duality, paranoia, and corruption are also found in *Rose* and, as in film noir, strengthen the film’s indictment of the state by graphically illustrating the effects of its flaws.<sup>228</sup> Tadi populates his film’s seedy urban milieu with despairing working class characters trying to navigate a society in which the rules and values of yesterday no longer apply. *The Dream About a Rose* places the culpability for this predicament—the failure to maintain a just socialist society—squarely on the state and absolves the working class of responsibility for its actions, however unlawful. In the Yugoslavia of Tadi’s film, a working man must become a criminal in order to afford “the Rose.” That the money belonging to smugglers of meat would end up in the hands of just such a man then is not a crime but poetic justice.

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<sup>227</sup> Schrader, “Notes on Film Noir,” 53. (only the phrase “mood of cynicism, pessimism, and darkness”)

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 58-61. (only the film noir themes outlined)

“If the Bosnians Didn’t Exist, We Would Have to Invent Them”: *Rams and Mammoths*

Not surprisingly, the economic crisis of the 1980s was felt more acutely in the less developed republics. The west weathered the storm considerably more comfortably than the east. This imbalance was part of the legacy of Yugoslavia’s regionally uneven economic development—itsself part of the legacy of centuries of foreign imperialism.<sup>229</sup> The consequences of past colonial subjugation now manifested themselves in the form of a clear division between the former Habsburg imperial possessions and those of the Ottomans. The Ottoman and Habsburg dominions divided what later became Yugoslavia along a pseudo-civilizational fault line which nevertheless had tangible implications to the country’s subsequent industrial and economic development. Slovenia and Croatia “benefited” from having been colonized by a Western European industrialized power. Slovenia managed to build an almost Western economy—competitive, and consumer demand oriented. The formerly Ottoman parts of the country badly lagged behind.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Slovenia became a magnet for migrant workers, especially those from Bosnia and Herzegovina where the trend of seeking employment away from home was more prevalent than elsewhere in Yugoslavia.<sup>230</sup> Perceived by the Slovenians as culturally “different,” these mostly unskilled labourers found themselves on the margins of Slovenia’s pseudo-Western society and were pejoratively referred to as the “southerners.”<sup>231</sup> As the austerity measures took hold, Slovenia gradually began to dissociate itself from the rest of

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<sup>229</sup> For more on this regional imbalance, see Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*, 261-309.

<sup>230</sup> Silva Mežnari , “*Bosanci*”: *A kuda idu Slovenci nedeljom?* (Beograd: Filip Visnji , 1986), 55-64. For a thorough sociological analysis of patterns of migration in Yugoslavia, see Silva Mežnari , *Osvajanje prostora—Prekrivanje vremena: Migracije umjesto razvoja* (Zagreb: Sociološko društvo Hrvatske, 1991).

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

Yugoslavia both economically and politically, most strikingly by not abiding by the austerity guidelines. Thinking itself sufficiently Western, Slovenia resented its association with “Ottoman” parts of the country, became reluctant to contribute to the federal budget, vehemently opposed any form of centralization, and instituted a hiring freeze for migrant workers.<sup>232</sup> Susan Woodward suggests that the reasoning behind the decision to stop hiring migrants was twofold: “cultural—fearing the loss of Slovene national distinctiveness and cultural identity if any more southerners arrived—and also economic—calculating that the cost of additional housing, social benefits, and other infrastructure would begin to eat into Slovene standards of living.”<sup>233</sup>

Depicting the experiences of Bosnian migrant workers in Slovenia in three narrative threads, Filip Robar-Dorin’s *Rams and Mammoths* deals precisely with this “cultural” and “economic” prejudice which saw the migrant workers as backward “southerners” whose presence in Slovenia is no longer tolerable. The film examines the consequences on the migrant workers of the Slovenians’ perception of themselves as geographically, economically and culturally Western, at least relative to the rest of the country. Robar-Dorin’s film is perhaps the only cinematic illustration of this curious manifestation of Balkanism which Milica Baki - Hayden calls “nesting Orientalism.” She points out that “while Europe as a whole has disparaged not only the orient ‘proper’ but also the parts of Europe that were under oriental Ottoman rule, Yugoslavs who reside in areas that were formerly the Habsburg monarchy distinguish themselves from those in areas formerly ruled by the Ottoman Empire, hence ‘improper.’”<sup>234</sup> In

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<sup>232</sup> On whom it had depended previously because it was losing its own skilled labourers to the West and had to replace them with those from Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*, 296.

<sup>233</sup> Woodward goes on to say: “Slovene policymakers preferred to ignore federal wage controls and allow wages to rise in order to entice back highly skilled Slovene workers and professionals who were working abroad, particularly in Austria, for better incomes.” Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, 64.

<sup>234</sup> Milica Baki -Hayden “The Nesting Orientalisms,” 922.

the film, the stigma of “Balkanness”—a marker of distance from the Western ideal which dictates that, however marginally, east is always more “Balkan” than west—becomes an agent of destruction of the mythical “Brotherhood and Unity.” Its first victim is the working class.

One of the film’s narrative threads follows Huso, an affable, plain-spoken Bosnian worker who arrives in Ljubljana only to encounter strong and puzzling enmity in his interactions with Slovenians. Frustrated by systemic discrimination against migrant workers in their own country, dispirited, but indignant Huso dies alone on a Ljubljana street. The second narrative thread follows Slavko, a young Bosnian attending a vocational school in Velenje to become a miner—part of Slovenia’s future work force. Almost antithetical to Huso’s jovial, easygoing roughneck, the intellectual Slavko spends his days contemplating his failed attempts to integrate Slovenia into his perception of homeland, eventually coming to the disheartening conclusion that Slovenian exceptionalism now trumps the all-encompassing Yugoslav identity. The third narrative thread follows Marko, a Slovenian vigilante with a pathological hatred of the “southerners” who attacks unsuspecting migrant workers after luring them into bar washrooms with a promise of casual sex. Following his arrest, Marko is “rehabilitated” by mental health experts, but shunned by the migrant community when he tries to make amends.

*Rams and Mammoths* fuses minimally dramatized fiction which mimics the observational documentary style of cinéma vérité with actually documentary sequences reminiscent of direct cinema’s attempts at ontological objectivity. As it explores both private and public spaces of the workers’ marginal existence—dorm rooms, showers, washrooms stalls, bars, dance halls—the film offers a variant of what Robert Daudelin terms, examining the style of Canadian auteurs emerging in the 1960s who utilized documentary aesthetics, a “marriage of the direct and

fiction.”<sup>235</sup> Discussing the same subject, Michel Euvrard and Pierre Véronneau describe the aesthetic simply as combining “traditional methods (scenario, actors, etc.) with direct methods.”<sup>236</sup> Robar-Dorin employs this aesthetic to stage the film’s somewhat Brechtian engagement with the migrant workers. Huso, Slavko, and Marko are played by professional actors, but they mostly interact with what appear to be actual migrant workers and state bureaucrats playing themselves, giving the interactions an improvisational quality and an air of unrefined authenticity. It is precisely in the sequences combining the “traditional” and the “direct” that Robar-Dorin gives the migrant workers the opportunity to be themselves (be “direct”), and to discuss with raw honesty their authentic experiences in Slovenia. Robar-Dorin facilitates conversations among migrant workers about the ways Slovenians’ discrimination functions in practice. This, in turn, speaks to other migrant workers who might recognize their own experiences while watching the film, and so encourages further conversation on the subject, in effect facilitating political engagement with one’s environment.

In one sequence combining the “traditional” and “direct,” Robar-Dorin shows the migrant workers to be without political agency, yet not without the astuteness to assess their predicament and perhaps even possessing the ability to inspire dialogue on the topic of anti-migrant sentiments in Slovenia among the workers watching the film. The sequence depicts Huso and his gruff friends gathered in a dorm room after a day’s work, listening to music on the radio, drinking, making lewd jokes. Gradually, however, the mood shifts and the sequence becomes a platform for the workers to discuss the Slovenians’ prejudice against them. The discussion is

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<sup>235</sup> Robert Daudelin, “The Encounter between Fiction and the Direct Cinema,” in *Self-Portrait: Essays on Canadian and Quebec Cinemas*, trans. Marie-Claude Hecquet and Antoinette Vidal, eds. Pierre Véronneau and Piers Handling (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1980), 106.

<sup>236</sup> Michel Euvrard and Pierre Véronneau, “Direct Cinema,” in *Self-Portrait: Essays on Canadian and Quebec Cinemas*, trans. Marie-Claude Hecquet and Antoinette Vidal, eds. Pierre Véronneau and Piers Handling (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1980), 82.

prompted by a radio program featuring a politician who praises the virtues of Slovenian nationalism, insisting that the Slovenians are “closer to Europe” and better able to uphold European values than the “Balkanites.” Recognizing himself as the villain of the politician’s narrative, Huso asks for the radio to be turned off and so prompts a “spontaneous” dialogue among the workers about what they had just heard. Gathering around a table, the workers begin to ask pointed questions about their treatment by the Slovenian state apparatus. One worker asks why the Bosnians and other outsiders are watched by the police more closely than anyone else in Ljubljana. Another alludes to the Slovenians’ persistent tendency, and a seemingly uncanny ability, to identify outsiders: “They know we are Bosnians as soon as they look at us.” Huso’s own flippant conclusion to the discussion is both humorous and insightful: “We are not Europe? Who is then? Who killed Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo!?” Alluding to Austria-Hungary’s decision to retain its imperial possessions by force thus starting World War I, Huso’s words contain a sound logic: the “Balkanites” changed European history and that surely makes them European.<sup>237</sup>

The sequence gives the workers a platform to talk through the intricacies of their predicament and blends the “traditional” and “direct” to give that platform authenticity. The sequence’s documentary aesthetic functions to give assurance to the spectator that the workers’ concerns are genuine. Although the sequence takes place in a confined space, Robar-Dorin’s is not a *vérité* camera which prods and provokes its subjects. Instead, it remains at a distance and unobtrusively observes the workers—only occasionally zooming in or out—in a true direct cinema fashion.<sup>238</sup> The provocateur and dialogue facilitator is Huso, played by Božidar Bunjevac

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<sup>237</sup> Also significant is that Huso’s remark points to the irony inherent in the legacy of Western European imperialism in places like Bosnia and Herzegovina where the Bosnian Serb Gavrilo Princip assassinated a representative of the Habsburg Empire into which Slovenia was fully integrated at the time. The Habsburgs included Bosnia and Herzegovina (albeit as a possession) into Europe following the departure of the Ottomans only for the Slovenians to now exclude them.

<sup>238</sup> Editing in the sequence fortifies this unobtrusive approach and hardly calls attention to itself.



who looks the part and blends in with the actual workers who appear in the sequence, never diminishing the sense of documentary authenticity.<sup>239</sup> Huso/Bunjevac guides this “documentary” mini-play through its improvised, minimally scripted assessment of the conditions under which the migrant workers live. Ultimately, the sequence functions as a Brechtian tool of political emancipation—it facilitates dialogue via which Huso and his friends come to recognize the mechanisms which have cast them as the Other in the Slovenian narrative of cultural superiority whose logic they reject outright.

*Rams and Mammoths* suggests that the marginalization and even criminalization of the migrant workers goes largely unnoticed. Symbolically suggesting that the workers have been pushed underground, the film shows Huso sleeping in a coffin-like space under the floor boards.<sup>240</sup> In a sequence consisting of only four shots and particularly indicative of how low the workers are situated in the social hierarchy, Robar-Dorin shows Huso stepping out of his “coffin” and then waiting with his friends to be picked up by a potential employer for a day’s worth of under-the-table low-paying construction work. Huso, one of the few lucky ones who get picked, is then briefly shown working at a construction site. The sequence’s central shot is a long take depicting the workers as they squat (a “southern” trait) at a pick-up spot by the road. Like prostitutes, they try to gauge when to stand up and “advertise” to drivers of passing vans—who may or may not be potential employers—that they are available for work. It is in this long take that Robar-Dorin employs an almost authentic direct cinema approach: he captures his subjects

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<sup>239</sup> Though by the time he appeared in *Rams and Mammoths* had been acting professionally for more than 20 years, Božidar Bunjevac was an untrained amateur actor.

<sup>240</sup> He enters his “room” through an actual door in the floor. Affixed to the door is a poster for the late spaghetti western, *The Godless Ones* (Roberto Bianchi Montero, 1972) which prompts one of Huso’s roommates to comment that “there is no God in Bosnia either,” alluding to the desperate situation back home which has forced the men to look for work in Slovenia.

in a telephoto shot, but accompanies the shot with on-location audio of the workers' playful banter recorded with a mic placed very close to them. The disparity between sound (intimate) and image (distant) stresses the importance of perspective in obtaining insight into the workers' predicament. Because the workers have been forced into an illegal black economy, their marginalization must be captured surreptitiously or not at all. Huso is eventually assigned a temporary job as a garbage collector and given a room in a dorm, but he is soon criminalized again. When Huso is cast out of the dorm like a common thug for breaking one of its petty house rules, he gets drunk and dies alone in a dark alley. The authorities quickly remove his body, symbolically cleansing the Slovenian society of the offending migrant worker presence.

Robar-Dorin exposes the chauvinism inherent in the presumption that the meeting of the "southerners" and Slovenians amounts to a clash of civilizations through Eisensteinian dialectical montages. The montages contrast the migrant workers who possess no political agency with the Slovenian state/republican apparatus rallying to confront them. The montages challenge the notion of Slovenians' superiority over the "Balkanites" by implying that the Slovenians are steeped in provincialism and narrow-mindedness. Robar-Dorin employs two kinds of approaches to montage. One approach is the Metzian "sequence shot" whereby the montage occurs within a single shot (as in Pavlovi's films) that gradually—through mobile framing and deep focus photography—brings into juxtaposition, and therefore into a dialectical relationship, two otherwise unconnected, but highly symbolic actions or objects.<sup>241</sup> The other approach involves a dialectical clash of entire sequences—occurring not back-to-back but at different points in the film—analogous to one another and therefore in dialogue. Both

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<sup>241</sup> See Metz, *Film Language*, 124.

approaches rely almost exclusively on the irony and metaphor that result from juxtaposition to create the Eisenstenian “intellectual resolution.”<sup>242</sup>

Robar-Dorin employs the first approach when he alludes to the inherent paradox of the perception that Slovenians are Europeans and migrant workers “Balkanites” through a juxtaposition that occurs within a single shot. As a Slovenian children’s choir sings “Ode to Joy” (the official anthem of the Council of Europe since 1972, and of the EC/EU since 1985) outside of the Workers’ Club in Velenje, the camera slowly zooms out from a tightly framed telephoto shot of the choir to a wide shot that reveals a graffiti scrawled on the nearby monument to Yugoslav Partisans: “Bosnians Out.” The wider frame provides a literally and symbolically more comprehensive view—the camera now “sees” the hidden content of the Slovenians’ pro-European posturing, in turn enabling the spectator to arrive at the “intellectual resolution.” (The zoom-out yet again emphasizes the importance of perspective.) The juxtaposition between the Slovenians’ desire to be European rather than Yugoslav—represented by the choir’s call to Europe—and their prejudice against the “southerners”—represented by the anti-migrant graffiti on a monument to the iconic Yugoslav Partisans—suggests that the Slovenians assert their European identity by imputing “Balkanness” to their Yugoslav Others.

Robar-Dorin employs the second approach when he mocks the Slovenians’ view that there is some fundamental civilizational difference between them and the “southerners” by showing, in two separate sequences, that the two groups spend their leisure time in strikingly similar ways. One sequence contains images from a concert by one of Yugoslavia’s biggest folk music attractions of the 1980s, Lepa Brena, held in Ljubljana and attended almost exclusively by the migrant workers. The other sequence depicts Slovenians also partying to live music at a

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<sup>242</sup> See Sergei Eisenstein, “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,” in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda (1949; repr., New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 62.

dance hall. At the Lepa Brena concert, the “southerners” sing along to songs in which they are referenced, and unselfconsciously delight in the singer’s bawdy performance.<sup>243</sup> The Slovenians at the dance hall are comparatively restrained in their enjoyment of the decidedly not risqué Slovenian folk music.<sup>244</sup> Robar-Dorin speeds up the footage at the dance hall in order to animate the Slovenians so their party matches the intensity of the migrant workers’ revelry. The montage’s “intellectual resolution” implies that the Slovenians’ perception of superiority can be chalked up to “the narcissism of minor differences”—Freud’s concept which describes how difference is utilized as an argument for superiority and how tiny distinctions between people are amplified into justification for hostility.<sup>245</sup> To hammer the point home, the dance hall sequence is accompanied with a droll, ironic voice over explaining that the “southerners” are essential to Slovenian national identity precisely because they are stereotyped as lazy, stupid, and unrefined; their presence in Slovenia is necessary because the Slovenians need someone to differ from in order to be Slovenian: “If the Bosnians didn’t exist, we would have to invent them.”

*Rams and Mammoths* illuminates the logic of “nesting Orientalism” by showing the Slovenian state apparatus actively working to marginalize the migrant workers in order to disassociate Slovenia from Yugoslavia’s “Balkanites” and obtain a European/Western identity.<sup>246</sup> In doing so, the film puts on display two effects of the economic crisis of the 1980s: the beginning of the process of unravelling of the country’s already fragile multiethnic fabric and the

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<sup>243</sup> Ironically, the lyrics portray Bosnians as superior to “real” Europeans: “I have been kissed by an Englishman, and I have been kissed by a Spaniard, but no one kisses like a Bosnian.”

<sup>244</sup> Slovenian folk music sounds almost indistinguishable from German or Austrian folk music, making the reference to Slovenians’ desire to be European even more pronounced.

<sup>245</sup> Freud, “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,” 131.

<sup>246</sup> A similar reading of the film is offered by Darko Štrajn, “Robar-Dorin’s Mirror: Rams and Mammoths in the Context of Yugoslav History,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 9, no. 4 (2011): 454-471.

completion of the process of dismantling of the working class as the backbone of the Yugoslav society. The austerity measures destabilized the country by highlighting the regional economic disparity, which, in turn, gradually led to interethnic animosities and to scapegoating of Yugoslav internal Others. *Rams and Mammoths* puts forth one simple claim: Yugoslavia is no longer the frame for a diverse yet integrated community, but a collection of communities increasingly hostile to one another. By highlighting this problem through experiences of the working class, specifically those of the migrant workers who, prompted by economic hardship, looked for work outside of their immediate communities only to realize they were not welcome elsewhere, the film suggests that the working class itself has become an Other. That the pillars of the Yugoslav socialist system, “Brotherhood and Unity” and the working class, were being jointly rejected meant the beginning of the end of the Yugoslav state.

### Conclusion

While it lacked the urgency and daring of the *Black Wave*, 1970s Yugoslav cinema was no less politically engaged. The six films I discussed explicitly comment on and indeed document Yugoslavia’s decline: dwindling economy, reduction in the standards of living and general disillusionment that followed the introduction of austerity measures. Perhaps most importantly, the films hint that the country’s experiment with market socialism, the subsequent debt crisis and the resulting austerity measures ultimately destabilized Yugoslavia by challenging its unity as well as its ability to remain authentically socialist. The shocking loss of standard of living in the 1970s and 1980s was felt most acutely by the increasingly irrelevant working class which, paradoxically, had no hand in running the country it theoretically ruled while the battle between the forces of centralization and liberalization exacerbated inter-republican squabbles over trade and contributions to the budget, highlighting the increasing ethnic tensions. The films

hold up a mirror to this reality in which the Yugoslavs could see themselves as rapacious, grasping, lewd, boorish, chauvinistic, aggressive, cruel, and indifferent, but, more importantly, they also directly or indirectly postulate that if the country's most revered ideals of "Brotherhood and Unity" and workers' self-management do not function, Yugoslavia has failed.

At its most essential, Živko Nikolić's *In the Name of the People* is a story about a country in which corrupt policemen can raze an honest working man's house to the ground with impunity. By depicting the security apparatus as routinely bullying and manipulating the workers who wallow in the deeply symbolic mud of the shanty town, the film suggests that for the working class, the Yugoslav Dream is but a nightmare. The film's historical depiction of sociopolitical dynamics in a small Montenegro town in the 1960s offers "genuine authenticity rather than static period accuracy."<sup>247</sup> Milutin, Todor, and Maksim may not have existed but as archetypes of the Yugoslav socialist state, they were representative of the Yugoslav sociopolitical reality. The film employs the specter of Ranković's reputation as a unitarist hardliner staunchly opposed to pluralism to highlight the disconnect between the working class and the state. Maksim's abuse of power mirrors that of Ranković, reinforcing the film's suggestion that Yugoslav socialism is inauthentic because it disenfranchises the working class. Milutin is an irrelevant pawn whose childlike earnestness is contrasted to the shrewdness and maliciousness of those around him. The relentless march of misfortune he experiences alludes to the gross disregard for the spirit of the workers' self-management system which was designed to enable the workers to "run their own lives and their own future."<sup>248</sup> The system was meant to be the "beginning of democracy" in Yugoslavia and even more importantly, "a radical departure

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<sup>247</sup> Zemon Davis, "'Any Resemblance to Persons Living or Dead,'" 26.

<sup>248</sup> Djilas, *The Unperfect Society*, 220.

from Stalinism.”<sup>249</sup> Quickly, however, it deviated into “fetishism of form, normativism, and dogmatic idealism,” allowing professional managers like Todor to be in charge of it, and encouraging bullish authoritarianists like Maksim to erode it.<sup>250</sup> As Todor’s business trip to the Congolese capital of Kinshasa symbolically implies, *In the Name of the People* ultimately suggests that Yugoslavia is not a progressive socialist country but rather one akin to a “Third World” kleptocracy: despotic, undemocratic, repressive, run by a power hungry corrupt elite.

Zoran Tadi ’s *The Dream About a Rose* also depicts the working class men and women as pawns in a game with an uncertain outcome. In the Yugoslavia of Tadi ’s film, the criminals reap the benefits of the economic crisis while the working families suffer. *Rose* repurposes various aspects of American film noir style and iconography into signifiers of the Yugoslav crisis, but it is the character of Valent who becomes the symbol of the predicament of the Yugoslav working class which was facing in the 1980s a thoroughly transformed society openly hostile to them. Valent’s alienation from the society and his resentment at being stripped of consumer power (while criminals are able to purchase everything from expensive cars to women) are indicative of how most working class men and women felt in the 1980s. Like so many of the American *film noir* characters, Valent is desperate and therefore prone to poor judgement which is precisely what facilitates his transgression into criminality. *Rose* stresses, however, that it is the society’s disregard for the economic woes of workers that causes Valent to lose control of his life and give in to the forces of darkness. The film implicitly poses one important question: Is it a surprise that a working man who cannot afford food for his family would turn to crime? Valent’s is hardly a real criminality when compared to that of the gangsters

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>250</sup> Phillips and Ferfila, *The Rise and Fall*, 106.

who rule the neighbourhood. It is also nuanced and qualified by the viewer's implicit understanding that in socialist Yugoslavia, a working man *should* be able to provide for his family. *The Dream About a Rose* lodges Valent in that space between guilt and innocence so often occupied by hapless film noir characters in order to assert that the working class has lost its status as the backbone of the society and is now anxiously facing an uncertain future.

The experiences of migrant workers in *Rams and Mammoths* point to just how uncertain the future was in the 1980s. Desperate, the workers leave their homes in search of jobs only to be met with overwhelming chauvinism in the economically prosperous part of the country where they are perceived as unwanted signifiers of economic and cultural "Balkanness" of Yugoslavia. The shame associated with being "Balkan," which in the film turns into hostility towards the "southerners," was rooted in the Western perception of backwardness of both the Balkans and of socialism. In *Rams and Mammoths*, servile quasi-Western posturing and the drive to highlight cultural differences between themselves and the "southerners," become for the Slovenians *the* methods of escaping "Balkanness" and of attaining the coveted European identity. The film utilizes a documentary aesthetic in order to provide the quality of authenticity and genuine insight to its depiction of just how stunned Huso and his friends are by being identified as the Other and treated as unwanted foreigners in their own country. Rather than the backbone of the society, the migrant workers are seen as a stultifying factor, preventing the Slovenians from reaching their true potential. The film utilizes Eisensteinian montage in order to mock this perception that to "Otherize" Yugoslavs who are not Western enough is necessary in order for the Slovenians to attain a European identity—to suggest that the Slovenians are acquiring not a cosmopolitan European worldview but an Orientalist one. Ultimately, *Rams and Mammoths*



exposes the emerging ethnic divisions as a side effect of the economic crisis which has challenged Yugoslavia's already fragile unity and began to tear the country apart.

Goran Markovič's *Variola Vera* offers a pessimistic allegory about Yugoslavs turning onto each other, seemingly unable to cope with pressures of the 1980s economic crisis and the austerity measures. There is little meaningful cooperation among the staff of the quarantined hospital. Most look after their own interests and, ironically, disregard the well-being of the patients. Those in positions of authority are unable to bear the burden of such a responsibility or rally the staff together. They are revealed to be either cowardly or cynical and therefore not authentically communist. Such depictions allude to the rising internal squabbles and constitutional crisis which threatened to destroy Yugoslavia in the 1980s. The film's allegory places the burden of responsibility for this state squarely on the country's leaders. The officials who hastily implement the film's quarantine at the urging of the UN and WHO are simply another incarnation of the New Class. Driven by self-interest, they pretend to be caring for the good of those trapped in the hospital, but retain a sense of entitlement and work exclusively to ensure their own well-being and safety. Crucially, the involvement of the UN and WHO in the smallpox outbreak crisis mirrors the involvement in the Yugoslav economy of the World Bank and IMF, ultimately suggesting that the austerity measures have set the country on course for just the kind of turmoil and disorder that occurs inside the film's quarantined hospital.

Krsto Papić's allegorical take on Yugoslavia, *The Rat Saviour*, also features duplicitous leaders who rally behind themselves an entire class of privileged citizens willing to shamelessly exploit the rest of the society which is completely unaware of the political dynamics unfolding clandestinely. The film's allegory seems to be geared towards alerting the viewer to one simple circumstance incongruous with socialist societies: the people are not in control of their political

environment. The film confronts the viewer with this truth—that Yugoslavia is not what it appears to be—and creates a sense of dissonance between the viewer and the society. This vague sense of incongruity—akin to the Freudian *uncanny*—is conjured up through the film’s depiction of the shapeshifters’ nefarious conspiracy as successful only because of their ability to masterfully pretend to be just like everyone else. The shapeshifters spread corruption and privilege in the form of disease which creates imposters who become cognizant that they must work to preserve their privileges and ensure the longevity of their class at all cost. The shapeshifters serve broadly as a metaphor for the ubiquitous New Class and more specifically for its summit: the country’s greedy leadership which was irresponsibly putting the country deep in debt to international financial institutions. Ivan’s difficult struggle to expose the shapeshifters and their conspiracy is itself a powerful metaphor for class division, inequality, alienation, and anxiety about the uncertain future, but also for the temptation of belonging to a privileged class. Ultimately, *The Rat Saviour* suggests that not only is Yugoslavia led by a greedy elite, but even ordinary citizens are guilty of thoughtlessly indulging in unsustainable lifestyles bound to lead to an even greater economic crisis.

In Vlatko Gili’s *Backbone*, the Yugoslavs’ anxiety about the future manifests itself as a mysterious disease that causes the infected to undergo an existential crisis, become contemplative, antagonistic, and, eventually, suicidal. *Backbone* focuses specifically on urban dwellers, crammed in brutalist-style highrises, who, unlike the Yugoslavs living in rural areas, could not grow their own food and therefore were more reliant on a stable economy. The film anticipates the disquieting climate of the austerity years when the economic crisis was at its peak and shortages of various staples forced those living in cities into the humbling position of having to anxiously wait for store shelves to be restocked. This, until the austerity, unfathomable

predicament deeply unsettled urban dwellers who found themselves in an ugly competition with their neighbours for the scarce supplies. The film's depiction of Pavle's increasingly pugnacious neighbours hints at the growing animosities among the Yugoslavs caused by the economic crisis, but, more strikingly, the film also seems to suggest that Yugoslavia is a socialist state in name only. The strange crematorium director, the custodian of the urban hell of *Backbone*, symbolizes the seemingly inevitable end of the Yugoslav socialist experiment. *Backbone* stresses the absurdity of maintaining the pretense of a prosperous socialist society and suggests that revolutionary romanticism that once helped inspire socialist spirit is antiquated and useless in the face of a serious economic crisis threatening to disintegrate the country.

Together, the six films analyzed in this chapter, especially the three that rely on disease as their central metaphor, allude to the fragility of the Yugoslav ideological belief system in time of economic crisis. Following Tito's break with Stalin, the forces of centralization and liberalization battled on both political and economic platforms with the latter gradually gaining advantage. Yugoslavia's foray into the global capitalist economy eventually resulted in a severe economic crisis which necessitated implementation of austerity measures and a radical change of lifestyle for the citizens. Tellingly, most seemed not to object to the paternalistic insistence on austerity measures by international financial institutions which amounted to a breach of Yugoslav sovereignty and implied that Yugoslavia was not in charge of its own affairs. Rather, as the films explicitly or implicitly suggest, the discontent was revealing itself in the form of growing antagonisms between republics who now saw each other as economic competition, and in the rising resentment of the very idea of Yugoslavia which typically manifested itself in ethnic nationalism. The films imply not only that Yugoslavia is a grotesquely degenerated socialist state but that the economic crisis is revealing that *no one ever* truly believed in its socialist ideals. The

films implicitly suggest that if a reduction in the standard of living is enough to turn Yugoslavs against one another, then the Yugoslav Dream was never real and petty resentments are likely to soon turn into open conflicts.

## Chapter 3

## Endgame: Darkness Descends on “Brotherhood and Unity”

This entire region has now been "Balkanized," that is, broken up into a number of nominally "national" states, which are small, weak, jealous, afraid, economically dependent, a prey to intrigue, and pregnant with trouble of many descriptions, not to say wars.

— Paul Scott Mowrer, *Balkanized Europe*

## Withering Away at the Gates of Europe

Although very few had anticipated the brutality of the 1990s conflict, Yugoslavia showed signs of being “destined” to burn up in a fratricidal war. Michael E. Brown’s overview of debates about the causes of intra-state ethnic conflicts which outlines specific destabilizing factors that tend to lead to such conflicts uncannily describes Yugoslavia of the 1980s. Brown points out that weak central states foster power struggles (economic, administrative, political, military), and resentment among ethnic groups who come to view each other as threats.<sup>251</sup> When ethnic discord occurs in multiethnic states whose populations are intermingled, clear cut secessionism becomes an impossibility since any secessionist project demands that the alien presence be purged.<sup>252</sup> Yugoslavia’s complex “ethnic geography,” which resulted from machinations by various imperial powers that had ruled the region in the past, facilitated ethnic discord and made tidy ethnic separation impossible.<sup>253</sup> Brown goes on to say that tensions between civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism also facilitate conflict, especially when the latter begins to dominate.<sup>254</sup> Yugoslavism was a form of civic nationalism which unfortunately never fully took hold; as the

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<sup>251</sup> Michael Brown, “The Cause of Internal Conflict: An Overview,” in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, rev. ed. eds. Michael Brown, Owen Cote, Sean Lynn-Jones and Steven Miller (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), 6.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 5. (Only the term, “ethnic geography.”)

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 8.

country decentralized, it was easily trumped by the myriad of ethnic exceptionalisms which facilitated not “Brotherhood and Unity” as intended, but ethnic animosities. That Yugoslavia was undergoing a major change in the late 1980s—restructuring its economic and political system—also contributed to the escalation. As Brown points out, “political transition,” even democratization as well as economic upheavals such as “transitions from centrally-planned to market-based economic systems” usually accompanied by unemployment and inflation can lead to intra-state ethnic conflict.<sup>255</sup> Finally, opportunistic political elites provoke ethnic conflict by employing ethnic scapegoating as they “fend off domestic challengers.”<sup>256</sup> Perhaps most disastrously, in the 1980s Yugoslavia, ethnic scapegoating was a tactic employed by most republican leaders desperate to retain power as the country transitioned out of communism. Old ethnic animosities were reawakened and new ones created as invocations of grievous historical injustices became routine. This dynamic in particular fostered instability and suggested that, following the death of president-for-life, Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslavia was not only leader-less, but, in a very real sense, retreating back into its own traumatic history rather than moving forward into the future.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Brown, “The Cause of Internal Conflict,” 8-10. Arguably, Yugoslavia was in what Brown terms the “semi-permanent state of economic shambles.”

<sup>256</sup> Brown, “The Cause of Internal Conflict,” 9-10.

<sup>257</sup> Tito’s death had not just a symbolic or psychological effect but also practical consequences for Yugoslavia as no political figure existed who possessed the authority to succeed Tito. Prior to his death, Tito promoted the concept of “collective leadership at all levels” rather than grooming or appointing a successor. Slobodan Stanković, *The End of the Tito Era: Yugoslavia’s Dilemmas* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1981), 58. This rather progressive idea took the form of the collective State Presidency and the Party Presidium, created prior to Tito’s death as contingency measures. They ran the country until its demise. (Rather fittingly, the only two political figures that could have succeeded Tito each epitomized a side in the dichotomy that Yugoslavia uneasily navigated throughout its existence. Edvard Kardelj, one of the architects of the self-management system and a proponent of decentralization, died a year before Tito; Aleksandar Ranković, an orthodox hardliner who was always staunchly for recentralization, was removed from political life in 1966.)

Following Tito's death in 1980, and especially near the end of the decade when the demise of the Soviet Bloc appeared certain, making a change of the system in Yugoslavia, too, inevitable, the ever-present battle between the forces decentralization and recentralization picked up steam. It became apparent that while some preferred to preserve the country's integrity, while somewhat grudgingly sacrificing its socialism, by strengthening its central power, the goal of those advocating decentralization was not a transition out of socialism, but also the country's dissolution. Crucially, this dichotomy was ethnically-inflected. At its ends were the Serbs, who championed Yugoslavia, but received only a token support from the West, and the Croats and Slovenes, whose efforts to dissolve Yugoslavia were met with a tacit approval. The Yugoslavs appeared to be questioning the very idea that unified them, and once again, as the American war correspondent Paul Scott Mowrer puts it when describing the effects of centuries of imperialism and outside meddling on the region in 1921, "Balkanizing" themselves into, "small, weak, jealous, afraid, economically dependent" tribes ready for war.<sup>258</sup> The Yugoslav socialist state was withering away as it was one day meant to, but petty ethnic hatreds of the past, not an evolution towards communism, filled the vacuum where socialist solidarity and a multicultural union, however flawed, once existed. As the Soviet Bloc crashed and Europe commenced the process of unification, Yugoslavia's socialist system found itself vulnerable to the whims of a new Europe, itself in transition, which saw socialism as a vestige of the past. Yugoslavia's calamitous end, though first and foremost the fault of its own peoples, can also be blamed on Europe's insistence on rapid political and economic reforms which encouraged ethnic discord and republican secessionism, facilitating the country's dissolution.

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<sup>258</sup> Paul Scott Mowrer, *Balkanized Europe: A Study in Political Analysis and Reconstruction* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1921), 3. Notably, this was likely the first time that the verb "Balkanize" was used.

Unlike most communist countries, Yugoslavia maintained comparatively strong economic and diplomatic ties with the West, especially with the European Community.<sup>259</sup> As the Cold War geopolitical balance began to disappear, it became apparent that economic reforms would have to precede any more robust economic cooperation between Yugoslavia and the EC.<sup>260</sup> This insistence on reforms proved a divisive tactic because it ensured that the EC's dealings with Yugoslavia tended to be regional, far stronger with Slovenia and Croatia—the two republics perceived as more likely to eventually fully reform—than with the rest of the country.<sup>261</sup> This inherently Balkanist approach excluded Yugoslavia as a whole from the EC membership consideration because the organization's enlargement policy favoured stable capitalist economies.<sup>262</sup> In fact, it encouraged secessionism in Croatia and Slovenia who had already begun to perceive the “Byzantine” parts of Yugoslavia as an obstacle to becoming

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<sup>259</sup> Although the relations between Yugoslavia and individual European states were often marred by political disagreements such as Yugoslavia's recognition of East Germany or the Italian-Slovenian border dispute, they gradually improved and “[f]rom the mid-1970s through 1990, [...] had come to embrace a variety of functional, consular, and multilateral issues” Zachary Irwin, “Yugoslavia's Relations with European States,” in *Beyond Yugoslavia: Politics, Economics, and Culture in a Shattered Community*, ed. Sabrina Petra Remet and Ljubiša Adamovich (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 369.

<sup>260</sup> See Radelji, *Europe and the Collapse of Yugoslavia*, 81-88. Arguably, the Cold War animosities had previously made Yugoslavia less eager to radically reform. Political science scholar Zachary Irwin points to two “myths” that Yugoslavia promoted, one asserting that both Warsaw Pact and NATO would eventually fail, and that Yugoslavia, by virtue of its nonalignment, would survive intact and more easily adjust to this change, and the other which propagated “threats” to Yugoslav security from both the East and West. Irwin suggests that the nonaligned status thus “became a pretext for resisting change. As a result of the situation, Yugoslav adjustment to the decline of polarization in Europe was relatively slow.” Irwin, “Yugoslavia's Relations with European States,” 351.

<sup>261</sup> For more on the insistence on reforms, see Radelji, *Europe and the Collapse of Yugoslavia*, 81-88. For more on the EC's preference for Slovenia and Croatia over Yugoslavia as a whole, see *Ibid.*, 68-69. For the EC to have a preference was only possible because the country had been substantially decentralized and individual republic were able to enter into trade agreements with third parties. Despite of this divisive dynamic, the Yugoslav leadership made a decision in 1988 “to realize associate membership in the EC by 1992.” Irwin, “Yugoslavia's Relations with European States,” 372. At this point, the economic and political decentralization of the past surely seemed counterintuitive because to reform its economy (or its system overall), Yugoslavia needed a strong central control.

<sup>262</sup> Radelji, *Europe and the Collapse of Yugoslavia*, 70. Balkanist because it rested on and perpetuated the perception of the civilized, progressive North-West and the backward South-East of Yugoslavia.



“properly” European and blamed the economic crisis specifically on the Serbs.<sup>263</sup> As Diana Johnstone points out, the myth of the undemocratic, anti-reformist, staunchly communist Serbs whose Yugoslavism was simply disguised despotism that could no longer be tolerated was perpetuated and utilized by the Croats and Slovenes—as well as by the Kosovo Albanians—during their secessionist campaigns in order “to create the impression [for the West] that the desire to escape from Yugoslavia was identical with the desire to escape from communism” and embrace capitalism.<sup>264</sup>

Discourse of ethnic nationalism, however, entered the public sphere much earlier. Encouraged by the fall of Ranković and the 1968 student demonstrations, the so-called liberals among Croatia’s communists, gathered into a movement called MASPOK (*Mosovni pokret*) from 1969 to 1971 and ostensibly pushed for economic reform and political decentralization. Their cultural program and views on the Croatian national question, singularly focused on the Serbs, especially Croatia’s Serb minority, however, hinted that they were envisioning a Serb-free Croatia. The movement, also known as the *Croatian Spring*, insisted that the Croatian language be extricated from the amalgamated Serbo-Croatian language; it advocated cleansing of Croatian culture and education of Serbian influence; it suggested, not entirely unjustifiably, that the Serbs were overrepresented in the League of Communists of Croatia and in the police force.<sup>265</sup> Most

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<sup>263</sup> Johnstone, *Fool’s Crusade*, 21.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>265</sup> This last point was particularly delicate because for the Croats, the Serb over representation in security echelons “was a permanent reminder that Yugoslavia had never escaped its Greater Serbian origins” while for the Serbs, it was “a guarantee against the resurgence of Ustase ideology.” Glenny, *The Balkans*, 591. For more on how Yugoslavism and various nationalisms were negotiated in culture and education—a dynamic which manifested itself in the conflict between the *Croatian Spring*, which saw itself as a progressive democratic movement fighting to preserve Croatian culture from both the Serbs and Yugoslavs, and those who saw it as a nationalist, reactionary movement—see Wachtel, *Making a Nation*, 173-226.

remarkably, the movement's influence normalized discussions of Croatia's future outside of Yugoslavia and, as historian Andrew Wachtel points out, hardly any "Croatian intellectuals hid their support of separatist ethnic national feelings at this time."<sup>266</sup> Though suppressed in 1971, the MASPOK saw some of its demands met. In contrast to the nationalist bend of the MASPOK, Serbia's "liberals," who appeared around the same time, remained deeply attached to the Yugoslav idea. They were economic reformists and democratic socialists, staunchly opposed to any form of dogmatism and nationalism, especially, to their credit, the Serbian. They spoke out against their own republic's domination in any form, and advocated equality and cooperation in all domains.<sup>267</sup> To the chagrin of cynics who suggested this was done solely in order to create an illusion of parity and so appease Croatia, displeased about the fate of the MASPOK, Serbia's "liberals," too, were denounced as dangerous agitators and suppressed in 1972.

By then, however, decentralizing inclinations had taken root. Delivering on the promise that Yugoslavia would evolve into a more democratic society, one in which decisions are made locally rather than centrally, the infamous 1974 Constitution made significant inroads towards confederalization and altered the system in ways so radical that many thought it delegitimized Yugoslavism.<sup>268</sup> By shifting the power "from the national center to the ethnonational periphery," it arguably contributed to the country's disintegration by helping transform "a community of

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<sup>266</sup> Wachtel, *Making a Nation*, 186.

<sup>267</sup> See Lampe *Yugoslavia as History*, 309-310.

<sup>268</sup> For a brief examination of the effects of the 1974 Constitution on Yugoslavia, including, most contentiously, the right to self-determination and secession, see Vojin Dimitrijević, "The 1974 Constitution and Constitutional Process as a Factor in the Collapse of Yugoslavia," in *Yugoslavia The Former and Future: Reflections by Scholars from the Region*, eds. Payam Akhavan and Robert Howse (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1995), 45-74.

nations [in]to a community of nation states.”<sup>269</sup> Seemingly an effort to weaken the Serbs, the 1974 Constitution gave unprecedented power to all republics except Serbia whose provinces, Vojvodina and Kosovo, both became autonomous which gave each a “near-republic status.”<sup>270</sup> Given that there were no such concessions for the Serbs living in Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina, some in Serbia saw this as an attack on the republic’s integrity.<sup>271</sup> Especially delicate, however, were the concerns of the Serbs living in Kosovo, formerly Serbia’s heartland, but by the 1980s practically cleansed of Serb presence, first by the Ottomans, and later, by a combination of poor economic prospects, low natality rates, and an organized campaign of intimidation and violence by the Albanians.

It was understood that the Albanians’ campaign for Kosovo to become a republic was “a prelude to secession.”<sup>272</sup> By the 1980s, civil disobedience, demonstrations, riots, and even acts of

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<sup>269</sup> Gojko Vučković, *Ethnic Cleavages and Conflict: the Sources of National Cohesion and Disintegration—the Case of Yugoslavia* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 1997), 7.

<sup>270</sup> Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, 40. Notably, these two autonomous regions with majority Hungarian and Albanian populations, respectively, acquired the power of veto on any decisions Serbia made while Serbia had little control over theirs.

<sup>271</sup> The 1974 Constitution made the republics into sovereign nation states (with Bosnia and Herzegovina being an exception because of its multi-ethnic makeup) with the right to secede. (The Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina were recognized for the first time by the 1974 Constitution as a separate nationality. They had previously generally been either Serbs or Croats of Muslim faith.) Serbia’s unease with this aspect of the Constitution was rooted in the fact that many Serbs lived in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina—if these republics were to secede, they would take, without their consent, the Serbs living there. The Serbs’ not unreasonable objections were cynically dismissed as Serbian nationalism, setting the stage for the almost messianic arrival, a decade later, of the Serbian leader, Slobodan Milošević. Many in Slovenia and Croatia saw Milošević’s appeals for Yugoslav unity as a ploy to reassert Serbia’s dominance within Yugoslavia, after rolling back portions of the 1974 Constitution, or, should the country break up, to create a so-called Greater Serbia, consisting of all the territories where Serbs lived. Paradoxically, the thorough economic reforms argued for by Slovenia and Croatia required a strong federal government able to have full authority over the country—they required revisions of the Yugoslav constitution in the direction of recentralization—precisely what the much maligned Milošević advocated. Many non-nationalist Serbs and even many non-Serbs recognized this and saw Milošević as a sympathetic figure who was fighting for Yugoslavia rather than for narrow Serbian interests (as was, and still is, casually imputed to Milošević). Indeed, Milošević skillfully exploited the fears of Kosovo Serbs to maneuver himself to the top of Serbian and Yugoslav political establishment, but, arguably, his unforgivable sin, in the eyes of the Slovenians and Croatians, was that he wanted to preserve Yugoslavia. For more on how and why the Serbs accepted the 1974 Constitution, see Dejan Jović, *Yugoslavia: A State that Withered Away* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2009), 95-141.

<sup>272</sup> Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 303.

terrorism by Albanians became routine and intimidation of the Serb minority systematic and effective.<sup>273</sup> Although Serbia's response was unreasonably harsh (Albanian irredentists were tried under suspicious circumstances and given draconian punishments), giving some credence to the perception of the Serbs as uncompromising hardliners, it was difficult to see Albanians as fighters against Serbian hegemony they professed themselves to be. Yet, this was precisely the view taken by Slovenia when, in 1988, Serbia began the process of removing the autonomies given to Kosovo and Vojvodina in 1974 and restoring its "constitutional integrity."<sup>274</sup> Cynically and cleverly, Slovenia made Albanian irredentism a cause célèbre and heavily utilized it in its own argument for confederalization as the solution to the allegedly intolerable Serbian despotism. Decentralization had already allowed for Slovenia's political and economic integration into Yugoslavia to drastically erode, but the republic continued to call for further constitutional reforms to allow it greater control over taxation, government subsidies, and

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<sup>273</sup> In what became known as the Para in Massacre, an ethnic Albanian soldier in the Yugoslav People's Army killed four and wounded five of his fellow soldiers as they slept in the military barracks in the city of Para in on September 3, 1987. In Slovenia and Croatia, the event was seen as a desperate act to draw attention to the persecution of Albanians, allegedly being driven out of Kosovo by the Serbs, rather than as a terrorist act. The statistics, however, suggest that the Serbs were the ones leaving Kosovo en masse. As John Lampe points out, "50,000 Serbs left during the 1970s." Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 304. For more on the Para in Massacre and its fallout, see Jovi , *Yugoslavia*, 263-264. Just how worried the Serbs were about their gradual expulsion from Kosovo is suggested by the infamous draft of the memorandum by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The state-of-the-nation document dealt with the deteriorating political and economic situation in Yugoslavia, with an emphasis on discrimination against the Serbs as decentralization took hold. Leaked under mysterious circumstances in 1986, the document focused in part on the erosion of the Serbs' national interests, especially in Kosovo, where it somewhat hyperbolically alleged a genocide was in progress. It caused a rather cynical outcry in Slovenia and Croatia because it allegedly advocated "Greater Serbia"—cynical because a similar document by the Slovenians ("Contributions to the Slovenian National Program"), arguing for an aggressive approach to preservation of Slovenians' national interests, and for independence from Yugoslavia, arrived in 1987 to no rebuke from anyone. Although it is typically discussed by biased pseudo-experts on Yugoslav affairs as the inspiration for Milošević's alleged dream to create Greater Serbia, Milošević, in fact, vehemently denounced it because of its implied nationalism. See Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 347. Read the document in *From Stalinism to Pluralism: A Documentary History of Eastern Europe Since 1945*, 2nd ed. ed. Gale Stokes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 275-280. For more on the document and its relationship to Serbian nationalism, especially in regards to Milošević and Kosovo, see Mihailo Crnobrnja, *The Yugoslav Drama* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 93-106. See also Jovi , *Yugoslavia*, 248-253.

<sup>274</sup> Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, 94.

exports.<sup>275</sup> The highly symbolic refusal to contribute to the budget to fund the Yugoslav People's Army accompanied the calls for Slovenia's full independence in the late 1980s.<sup>276</sup>

Like Slovenia, Croatia saw Yugoslavia as a financial burden, and like the Albanians, it saw the Serbs as an irksome wrinkle in the republic's ethnic homogeneity. Redistribution of revenue from tourism had long fueled Croatia's discontent, but the situation was drastically exacerbated by the IMF-imposed austerity measures which made a significant dent in Croatia's tourist industry.<sup>277</sup> In the 1980s, Croatia deemed its contributions to the federal budget a form tribute paid to Serbia, a suzerain greedily siphoning off the tourism revenue. This resentment, however, was accompanied by a revival of atavistic fantasies of an ethnically pure Croat state, that the Serbs felt derived from the doctrine of the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* or the NDH), a Nazi satellite state which conducted a campaign of genocide in World War II as it sought to convert to Catholicism or exterminate all Serbs in its territory.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> For more, see Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, 67-73.

<sup>276</sup> For more on Slovenia's opposition to and refusal to fund the YPA, see Jović, *Yugoslavia*, 327-331. For more on Slovenia's attitudes towards Yugoslavia, the Serbs, and the YPA, see Johnstone, *Fool's Crusade*, 132-144. Such symbolic acts of rejection of Yugoslavia also had practical consequences for Yugoslav stability. As Susan Woodward points out, "Slovenia's attempts to enhance its sovereignty by denying federal authority in ever more fields was automatically depriving the federal government of the means to enforce any decision." Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, 85. For more on how Slovenia's efforts to deny the authority of the Yugoslav government as it plotted secession, see Ana S. Trbovich, *A Legal Geography of Yugoslavia's Disintegration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 173-187. For more on the often conveniently disregarded explosion of Slovenian nationalism in the 1980s, see Jović, *Yugoslavia*, 314-327. Read also Dimitrij Rupel, "The Slovene National Question," in *From Stalinism to Pluralism: A Documentary History of Eastern Europe Since 1945*, 2nd ed. ed. Gale Stokes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 281-284.

<sup>277</sup> The regions "with higher tourism revenue expressed grievance at having part of 'their' funds allocated to development projects in poorer regions of the country." Taylor and Grandits, "Tourism and the Making of Socialist Yugoslavia," 12. The Adriatic was a popular holiday destination for Western European tourists with pockets not deep enough to take them to ritzier places. They brought in the much-needed hard currency for the state coffers, and for the locals who earned income from room rentals and related services. Much anecdotal evidence suggests that Croatia's turn away from Yugoslavia and towards the West strongly manifested itself in the preference of the locals for the foreigners who had more money to spend and ate at restaurants, and in resentment of the vacationing Yugoslav workers who often brought food with them.

<sup>278</sup> The NDH included not just today's Croatia, but also all of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as parts of Serbia. Estimates vary from 300,000 to 1,000,000 Serbs—most from the Krajina region of Croatia, and from Bosnia and Herzegovina—killed by the Croats during World War II. In the Croatian concentration camp of Jasenovac alone

Soon, the rhetoric of the Serb nationalists fueled fears of a repeat of the genocide. This paranoid frenzy inspired a revival of the Chetniks, a movement with roots in Serbia's struggle for liberation against the Ottomans, but whose World War II incarnation was guilty of committing atrocities in parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia during World War II (though their crimes pale in comparison to those of the Ustashe, the elite soldiers of the NDH). The Chetnik revival was grudgingly tolerated by Serbia's communists on account of the shared concern for the fate of the Serbs living outside of Serbia.

By the late 1980s then, the omnipresent civic nationalist slogan, "Brotherhood and Unity," which not only meant that the state insisted on ethnic harmony, but also implied that to give in to ethnic nationalism would likely mean new bloodshed, seemed ominously foreboding and, in retrospect, ironically prescient. The dilemma that the slogan encapsulated was, as political analyst Dejan Jović puts it, whether Yugoslavia was "an association of communities" or "a community in itself."<sup>279</sup> The answer came when, following the multi-party elections and declarations of independence by Croatia and Slovenia in 1991, and shortly after by Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia, Yugoslavia finally ceased to exist. The Yugoslav system, as Diana Johnstone points out, "was certainly not designed to oppress national minorities, nor did it have that effect."<sup>280</sup> Yet, the difficult economic and political reforms coupled with Yugoslavia's complicated "ethnic geography" ensured that, only somewhat ironically, Yugoslavism, cynically framed as Serbian subterfuge, would be the target of dissent. As Dejan Jović points out, by

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it is thought that between 300,000 and 700,000 mostly Serbs were killed by methods and efficiency that allegedly appalled even the Nazis. Glenny, *The Balkans*, 487. For estimates regarding the number of Serbs slaughtered by Croats in World War II, see Srđan Bogosavljević, "Drugi svetski rat—Žrtve u Jugoslaviji," *Republika*, June 1995, xi-xvi. It should be noted that although Croats predominantly sided with the Nazis, many also joined the communist Partisans.

<sup>279</sup> Jović, *Yugoslavia*, 47.

<sup>280</sup> Johnstone, *Fool's Crusade*, 129.

making ethnic nationalism its main enemy, the state “promoted such nationalism as the main alternative to itself.”<sup>281</sup> In retrospect, rejecting the Yugoslav idea outright rather than preserving Yugoslavia, the *ideal* framework for the South Slavs, and confronting Serbia’s hegemonic tendencies if necessary was senseless. Entering the post-communist 1990s, Yugoslavs found themselves living in a smattering of hostile nation states and territories, once again susceptible to outside manipulation, “pregnant with trouble of many descriptions, not to say wars.”

#### Predictions of Fire: Yugoslav Cinema after Tito

The future is known only to the gods and to dogmatists.

—Milovan Djilas *The Unperfect Society*

In the 1980s, Yugoslavs were busy watching American soap operas like *Dynasty* (1981-1989) and *Dallas* (1978-1991), amused by the intrigue involving the Carringtons and the Ewings whose affluence sharply contrasted their own daily struggles and likely soothed the anxieties about the future. The loss of the living standards and the near-disappearance of the middle class spelled out a simple truth: the Yugoslav Dream has run out—the good life indeed seemed to exist only in tawdry American fantasies. Popular Yugoslav cinema of the 1980s tended towards inane escapist comedies like *A Tight Spot* (Milošević, 1982) which poked fun at the country’s economic decline by featuring loveable, folksy characters whose misadventures and antics were acts of desperation often necessitated by financial dire straits. These massively popular films found humour in the disappearance of the Yugoslav Dream and suggested that to laugh at one’s own misery was the best way to escape it. Their popularity arguably indicated that most Yugoslavs, though dismayed, were also at least somewhat optimistic that the country would eventually rebound. Most understood that the socialist system would have to be abandoned and

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<sup>281</sup> Jovi, *Yugoslavia*, 21.

the old guard conservatives replaced with progressive, reform-oriented politicians in order for Yugoslavia's economy to catch up with the rest of Europe. That the times were changing was obvious enough, but very few foresaw the cataclysmic end and the fratricidal war the country would be experiencing by the early 1990s.

Spearheaded by the so-called *Prague School* (the filmmakers who went to film school in Prague, Czechoslovakia, in the 1970s and who retained a taste for politically sensitive topics, if not for the formal experimentation of the *Black Wave*), Yugoslav cinema went through a curious creative rebirth in the 1980s despite difficult economic conditions. The *Prague School* filmmakers revitalized Yugoslav cinema thanks to the success of such films as Emir Kusturica's poignant political family drama dealing with the price paid by the innocents during the clash between Stalinism and Titoism in the 1950s, *When Father Was Away on Business* (1985), and Ljodan Zafranovi 's *The Occupation in 26 Tableaux* (1978), an examination of the effects of the Italian occupation of coastal Croatia on local population during World War II which featured *extremely* graphic depictions of the Ustashe atrocities. These filmmakers somewhat irked the establishment by achieving international recognition while addressing topics previously deemed taboo. Perhaps most importantly, unlike the filmmakers of other socialist countries with access to American films, the films of the *Prague Group* routinely outperformed Hollywood fare at the box office.<sup>282</sup> Yet, the Yugoslav economic crisis loomed large even over the *Prague School* filmmakers whose successes did little to revamp the industry itself. Ticket prices remained low and audiences increased, but inflation made revenues from admissions meagre; the studios slowly deteriorated and securing financing became increasingly difficult for Yugoslav

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<sup>282</sup> Andrew Horton, "The New Serbo-Croatianism," *American Film*, January 1986, 24-30.



filmmakers.<sup>283</sup> Still, rather remarkably, this creatively revitalized, but infrastructurally collapsing cinema, which came to be known as the *New Yugoslav Cinema* and encompassed many stylistically and ideologically diverse filmmakers, offered some exceptionally astute insights into the Yugoslav society edging towards its demise.

Daniel Goulding suggests that while some of the more pessimistic films may have grasped the gravity of the twin economic and political crises, they hardly foresaw the country's break up.<sup>284</sup> Never particularly stringent, film censorship in Yugoslavia became even more relaxed throughout the 1980s, allowing filmmakers to address with stinging cynicism some formerly taboo topics like Tito's persona, the Ranković affair, the World War II atrocities committed by Yugoslav Nazi collaborators on other Yugoslavs, and the Tito-Stalin conflict, especially the persecution of those who remained faithful to Stalin. Films like *The Battle of Kosovo* (Zdravko Šotra, 1989) examined the pre-Yugoslav past, specifically the trauma of Ottoman imperialism and so hinted at an increasing obsession with historical memory. Others focused on the more recent past and, defying the tendency in Yugoslavia to avoid such discussions, dealt with topics involving crimes committed by Yugoslav against other Yugoslavs during World War II. *Hawk Did Not Love Him* (Branko Schmidt, 1988) focuses on the struggle of a Croat peasant to remain neutral at the outset of World War II when both Partisans and Ustashe come calling. Similarly, *Silent Gunpowder* (Bato Ćengić, 1990) deals with the dilemmas faced by Bosnian Serbs when presented with a choice between the royalist Chetniks and communist Partisans in World War II. By examining aspects of the country's history previously almost untouchable, and implicitly questioning the value of "Brotherhood and Unity," forged in

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<sup>283</sup> Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 148-149

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 144.

the mythical battles of World War II, these revisionist films obliquely engaged with the problem of emergence of rabid ethnic nationalism in the 1980s. Some offered extremely pessimistic visions of the Yugoslav society and *did*, I argue, prophesize, even if via metaphor, the country's demise. Overall, most of the politically engaged Yugoslav cinema of the 1980s offers depictions of Yugoslavia as a country whose ethnic groups are frenziedly combing historical memory for traumas to excuse their zealotry and engaging in an increasingly confrontational public discourse of ethnic nationalism likely to lead to bloodshed.

This chapter focuses on three films particularly representative of this trend: *Dangerous Trail* (Miomir Stamenkovi , 1984), *Maternal Half-Brothers* (Zdravko Šotra, 1988), and *Déjà vu* (Goran Markovi , 1987). Examined together, the films reveal a portrait of a country stuck in a cycle of obsessively re-examining its traumatic past and ridden by anxieties over the escalation of ethnic tensions caused by precisely that obsession. They imply that the state no longer has the authority to promote let alone enforce the ethnic coexistence Yugoslavia was built upon and is therefore powerless to prevent the country's imminent disintegration and descent into an ethnic war. Through their narratives about how the infamous Yugoslav "emigration"—the ultra-nationalist expatriates living in the West, and actively engaging in propaganda and terrorist activity against the Yugoslav state—fanned the flames of ethnic conflicts, *Dangerous Trail* and *Maternal Half-Brothers* suggest that "Brotherhood and Unity" is a farcical notion. *Dangerous Trail* is a thriller which takes place in 1980, a year before the infamous demonstrations in Priština during which Albanians demanded that Kosovo, having acquired autonomy within Serbia, be made into a separate republic, often pinpointed as the start of Yugoslavia's disintegration.<sup>285</sup> Its narrative follows Nafi, a young Albanian living abroad as he attempts to

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<sup>285</sup> For more, see Jovi , *Yugoslavia*, 176-200.

smuggle weapons into Kosovo to be used by his fellow irredentists in an insurgence against the state and in attacks against the Kosovo Serbs. Nafi's operation, jointly organized by irredentists based in Switzerland and in Kosovo, begins to derail after he becomes involved with a Belgrade waitress. With police on his trail, Nafi clashes with his father and brother who do not share his irredentist ideology. He gets arrested in the family house after his father informs the police of his whereabouts. The story of *Maternal Half-Brothers* covers a period of about fifty years—from World War II to the late 1980s—and focuses on the tragic personal fates of two half-brothers born on the slopes of mount Dinara in Croatia who had never met. Reminiscing about the past in audiotaped testimonials they exchange by mail, Braco, a Croat living in Austria and wanted in Yugoslavia for his terrorist activities, and Veselin, a Serb awaiting trial for murder in a Belgrade jail, piece together their family's history. The film ends with the two half-brothers realizing that Yugoslav ethnic identity politics have needlessly robbed them of brotherly bonds as they embrace for the first time in the jail courtyard when Braco returns from exile to visit Veselin.

I jointly examine *Dangerous Trail* and *Maternal Half-Brothers* through the prism of what Benedict Anderson terms “long-distance nationalism”—the activities of expatriates who exert concrete political influence on their homelands through political lobbying, funding or even committing acts of terrorism, yet cannot be held accountable by the state for their actions.<sup>286</sup> I deal with this aspect of the films using Svetlana Boym's discussion of nostalgia which proposes two overlapping yet distinct types of sentimentality for the past: *restorative* which aims to lead back to some mythological former glory and often feeds authoritarian fantasies of nationalist projects by idealizing the past, and *reflective* which acknowledges the loss of the past and

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<sup>286</sup> Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), 58-76.

accepts that its memory is full of gaps and inconsistencies.<sup>287</sup> I examine the ways the two films implicitly suggest that Braco's and Nafi's projects—the retrieval, as if from a storage room of history, of the ethnically pure environs that (may have) once existed—are driven by *restorative* nostalgia and are therefore intrinsically unsound. Most importantly, throughout my discussion, I focus on both films' explicit and implicit disapproval of decentralization which, they imply, encouraged secessionism and resulted in the paradigm-shifting 1974 Constitution which legally entrenched Yugoslavia's ethnic discord, taking the country towards dissolution.

My discussion of *Dangerous Trail* addresses how the film reflects the Serbs' simmering resentment over Aleksandar Rankovič's ousting, arguably the precursor to the more radical decentralization of the 1974 Constitution which practically disappeared Yugoslavia "from the constitutional order of the country, in that 'Yugoslavia' was now only what the federal units decided, by consensus, it would be."<sup>288</sup> As a result, the 1974 Constitution, *Dangerous Trail* implies, sealed the fate of Kosovo as a restive province of Serbia from which the Serbs are slowly expelled because the state is powerless—and perhaps even unwilling—to reign in the Albanian irredentists. *Dangerous Trail* implicitly laments Rankovič's ouster which indeed signaled that the central power of the state was weakening and that hardline tactics of suppression of dissent—even of extreme ethnic nationalism meant to destabilize the state—would no longer be utilized. The film sides with the view, common among the Serbs, that the 1974 Constitution, which gave Kosovo an autonomous status within Serbia, encouraged

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<sup>287</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41-55. The difference between the two types can be likened (ironically) to the difference between a metaphor and a simile. The former establishes a relationship of equality or sameness, and its rhetorical power is in the denial that the relationship is merely analogous; the latter explicitly claims similarity but implicitly acknowledges that the likeness would not stand scrutiny because it is casual, even preposterous.

<sup>288</sup> Ivan Vejvoda, "Yugoslavia 1945-91: From Decentralization without Democracy to Dissolution," in *Yugoslavia and After: A Study in Fragmentation, Despair and Rebirth*, eds. David Dyker and Ivan Vejvoda (London: Longman, 1996), 15-16.

Albanian irredentism and its *restorative* fantasies and so flagrantly harmed Serbian national interests. In my discussion, I focus on the ways *Dangerous Trail* argues the Serbs' standpoint which was that Kosovo, as the birthplace of the Serbian state, the site rejuvenation of Serbian culture and church, and therefore *the* symbol of Serbian identity, is no one's to give away.

Perhaps the most important thread that runs through my discussion of *Dangerous Trail* revolves around the film's two intertwined suggestions regarding Yugoslavia's rapid destabilization in the 1980s. The first is that those in Yugoslavia who supported decentralization were opportunistically aiming to weaken both Serbia and Yugoslavia by cynically championing the Albanian cause in Kosovo while ignoring legitimate Serbian grievances. The second is that the West, as the place from which the "emigration" stages its activities, is deeply implicated in the process of destabilization of Yugoslavia. Ultimately, the film deems the state's toleration of Albanian irredentism, which indeed seemed to lack any discernable effort at consensus with the Serbs or even a minimum of respect for their concerns, as at best misguided and at worst as criminal.<sup>289</sup>

Like *Dangerous Trail*, *Maternal Half-Brothers* has as its subtext the processes of decentralization, firmed up by the 1974 Constitution, which arguably made it easier for ethnic nationalists to pursue their goals of breaking up the country. My discussion of the film focuses specifically on its suggestion that the *Croatian Spring* validated anti-Serb biases in Croatia and encouraged its "emigration," which upheld the genocidal ideology of the NDH, to pursue terrorist activities against the Serbs and against Yugoslavia. I especially focus on Braco as an

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<sup>289</sup> *Trail* could not have been more topical. The gradual expulsion of Kosovo Serbs was at the forefront of Serbian politics and major source of frustration. Stories—some admittedly exaggerated—of violence by Albanians against Serbs abounded and helped form the perception (cynics would say the myth) of Albanian disregard for Serb life and dignity; street demonstrations by both Serbs and Albanians, voicing their grievances seemed routine in the 1980s.

amalgam of *restorative* and *reflective* nostalgia. In the recordings made for Veselin, Braco reminisces about and appears nostalgic for Croatia's fascist past (free of the Serbs and of the shackles of Yugoslavia), a sentiment which led him in his youth to take active part in "long-distance nationalism" in order to restore the NDH. Yet, aspects of Braco's recollections, coupled with the fact that he eventually returns home to face the consequences of his past actions, also suggest *reflective* nostalgia. The taped messages to Veselin, and the flashbacks they "produce," form an inventory of Braco's life which concludes an era and so symbolizes Braco's acceptance that the past will not return. Crucially, my discussion of Braco's recordings and of the attendant flashbacks focuses on the gaps and omissions both contain. I argue that these omissions suggest that neither the recordings nor the flashbacks that result from them are definitive or authoritative in their recap of how historical upheavals affected the life among the Serbs and Croats under mount Dinara and therefore imply that Braco's glorification of the NDH is misguided because it is based on a lack of concrete historical knowledge.

My discussion of how Braco's recollections, and the flashbacks that accompany them, hint at the interplay—and the clash—of the political and the personal relies on film scholar Maureen Turim's discussion of how the flashback structure facilitates a juncture between the present and the past, offers a "rendering of history as a subjective experience," and often provides the "means of questioning the conceptual foundations of history in its relationship to narrative and narrative in its relationship to history."<sup>290</sup> The Croat village, Šmrekovo, and Serb village, Kulina, are the microcosms of the two ethnic groups while Braco and Veselin, of course, symbolize the uneasy Yugoslav "Brotherhood and Unity." Their personal histories form a history of the Serb-Croat tensions, suggesting that the personal is inevitably political—the half-brothers'

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<sup>290</sup> Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 1-2.

destinies are tragic *because* of the larger societal and political upheavals. Although Braco is adamant that “the truth must be remembered,” he is unreliable as a witness to history; he *does not* remember the NDH’s heinous crimes against the Serbs. By virtue of being borne out of personal memories limited in scope, the film’s flashbacks, and the narrative they form, question the validity of the historical basis of the Croats’ *restorative* nostalgia which fuels their resentment of the Serbs and of Yugoslavia. Without Veselin’s input, Braco’s recollections are incomplete and indeed false. The film ultimately suggests that only jointly can the two half-brothers form a narrative of their pasts and so form a mostly accurate narrative (which, appropriately and highly symbolically, even then remains fractured) of the Serb-Croat discord.

While *Trail* and *Half-Brothers* hint at “mere” ethnic discord, *Déjà vu* ominously predicts that the crisis will surely escalate and result in a catastrophic end for Yugoslavia. The slasher horror narrative of *Déjà vu* formulates a concern about Yugoslavia’s increasing obsession with history, especially with re-examination of its traumatic past, through the symbolism of the film’s main character’s own experience with trauma. Most of Marković’s film takes place in the 1980s and focuses on Mihailo, a morose piano teacher traumatized in childhood by the execution of his “bourgeois” thespian father for treason shortly after the war. The event spurred on further family tragedy and decades of deep depression for Mihailo who finds hope for a new beginning in a romance with the sultry Olgica. When the nearly penniless Olgica—prone to escaping the harsh reality via sex—callously rejects the naïve and sexually repressed Mihailo, his frustrations boil over and he lashes out at those around him in a murderous rage. In my analysis of the film, I suggest that Mihailo’s personal traumas, which bubble up to the surface to manifest themselves as a violent rampage, stand for the Yugoslav society’s obsession with historical traumas in the 1980s. Through the symbolism of Mihailo’s murderous rage, I argue, *Déjà vu* warns that

macabre obsessions with historical trauma will spawn cults of victimhood, deepen ethnic and political divisions, and ultimately cause Yugoslavs to violently lash out against each other.

I examine *Déjà vu* as a uniquely Yugoslav interpretation of the American slasher horror genre of the 1970s and 1980s. Behind depictions of murderous male aggression in many of the classic slashers lie oblique commentaries on American traumas like the Vietnam War, societal ills like racism, the entrenchment of conservative social and political philosophy, and the emergence of unrestrained capitalism. Though more pointed than its American counterparts, *Déjà vu*, too, is somewhat ambiguous as it comments on its sociopolitical context. Obviously enough, Mihailo's anguish and subsequent explosion of anger into violence broadly represent the discontent that pervaded the Yugoslav society in the 1980s. Like many slasher killers then, Mihailo is a personification of *the return of the repressed* and allegorizes societal dysfunction with roots in some disavowed problem. In my discussion of how Mihailo's character conveys concrete political message despite the film's psychosexual genre trappings, I utilize Robin Wood's concept of "incoherent texts" used to describe certain American films of the 1970s which although lacking a clear political stance are insightful and symptomatic of their sociopolitical context—sometimes thanks precisely to the "incoherence."<sup>291</sup> Mihailo's inability to suppress his rage, already seeping through the façade of affability, I argue, mirrors the way Yugoslavia barely maintained the pretense of normality while its deeply frustrated citizens were about to erupt in a rage facilitated by obsession with historical trauma. In my discussion, I suggest that through Mihailo's character, *Déjà vu* forewarns of the political elites soon to emerge and play up these frustrations, magnify the real and imagined historical injustices, with apocalyptic results.

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<sup>291</sup> Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan...And Beyond*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 41-43.



I develop my arguments by relying on Carol Clover's seminal essay on the slasher horror genre, "Her Body, Himself," and I outline precisely how *Déjà vu* conforms to and transplants the tropes of the American slasher to astutely comment on its own sociopolitical context. I especially focus on the film's quintessentially slasher positioning of Mihailo as emotionally cemented into a particularly traumatic moment in childhood when, having developed a deep Oedipal attachment to his mother, he lost her. Suffering frequent memory flashbacks to his traumatic childhood, the adult Mihailo is extremely uneasy around others, especially women, a neurosis initially soothed by the flirtatious Olgica. Upon witnessing Olgica's sexual promiscuity and realizing her ambivalence towards him, however, the "grip of boyhood" turns into a typically slasher murderous male aggression aimed to punish the female sexual "transgressions."<sup>292</sup> Usually deemed a manifestation of the culture of male chauvinism, prudishness and conservatism in American slashers, Mihailo's inability in *Déjà vu* to let go of his childhood traumas and the resulting "psychosexual fury" symbolize the Yugoslavs' simmering anger—fuelled by the economic crisis—that found "justification" within historical memory and trauma and threatened to explode into a bloody conflict.<sup>293</sup> Though it may suffer from ideological "incoherence" attendant to slashers, *Déjà vu* clearly conveys the view that Yugoslavia disavowed the severity of its ethnic discord and its connection to the economic crisis, a discord which bubbled up to the surface in the late 1980s and exploded into the shocking brutality of the 1990s war.

My discussion in this chapter of *Dangerous Trail*, *Maternal Half-Brothers* and *Déjà vu* amalgamates the films' commentaries on the consequences of the economic crisis which

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<sup>292</sup> Carol Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," *Representations* 20, no. 20 (1987): 195. (only the phrase "grip of boyhood")

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 194. (only the term "psychosexual fury")

destabilized Yugoslavia by prompting further constitutional changes, in turn, encouraging ethnic discord to provide a portrait of the country as it headed towards its catastrophic end in the early 1990s. *Dangerous Trail*, a thriller *remarkable* in how directly it addresses the subject of Serbian anxieties regarding Albanian irredentism, and *Maternal Half-Brothers*, a drama which equally directly deals with Serb-Croat discord, both voice the sentiment that appeasing the (more often than not) exaggerated ethnic grievances through decentralizing constitutional changes only serves to further strengthen ethnic nationalists seeking to destroy Yugoslavia. Both films suggest that such radical reforms are facilitating a complete disappearance of Yugoslavism by validating the once frowned upon ethnic nationalism and setting the stage for the creation of ethnically pure nation states in Yugoslavia's place. *Déjà vu* taps into the catastrophic potential of these developments which found their cultural outlet in the form of the obsession with historical memory so en vogue in the 1980s and, forming a vicious circle, further fueled ethnic resentments. *Déjà vu* symbolically suggests that this trend of wallowing in victimhood, akin to a psychosis, is bound to result not just in a termination of the Yugoslav federation but in a spectacularly apocalyptic demise of "Brotherhood and Unity." Ultimately, my analysis of the three films serves to create a portrait of Yugoslavia, a captain-less ship following Tito's death in 1980, on its last legs as its demise quickly approached.

#### Long-Distance Nationalists: *Maternal Half-Brothers* and *Dangerous Trail*

The narrative of Zdravko Šotra's *Maternal Half-Brothers* is comprised of a series of flashbacks which visualize the audio recordings exchanged between Braco who works as a dog-handler for a family of Austrian aristocrats, and the still teenage Veselin soon to be tried in a Belgrade court for a prom night murder. Feeling some intangible connection, Braco establishes contact with Veselin upon recognizing his half-brother in a newspaper report about a "school boy

killer” and the two begin exchanging audio tapes in which Braco outlines for the much younger Veselin the family history prior to his birth while Veselin describes for Braco the period after he left Yugoslavia for Austria. The personal experiences of the two half-brothers who share the same Croat mother, but have embraced the ethnic identities of their fathers comprise a grim historical portrait of Serb-Croat animosities. They touch on some extremely difficult topics like the deep wounds of the NDH genocide committed on the Serbs, the Croat perception of post-war Serb revanchism, the implications of the Croat national “reawakening” in the late 1960s and early 1970s, especially for the Serbs and Croats of the Krajina region, the anti-Yugoslav and anti-Serb activities of the Croat “emigration” inspired by the NDH ideology. The taped testimonials weave personal and family histories made tragic by war, sociopolitical upheavals, and terrorism, the totality of which ultimately makes Braco and Veselin realize that they are inextricably entangled. Although realizing that he would be arrested for his involvement with the Croat “emigration” in Austria, which includes terrorist activities in Croatia, Braco decides to come back to Yugoslavia to see Veselin. The two half-brothers embrace in the jail courtyard under the watchful eye of the warden in the film’s faintly optimistic final image—a freeze-frame implicitly validating the federal state and questioning the wisdom of the mythical animosity between the Serbs and Croats

The subtext underlying *Maternal Half-Brothers* is the history of foreign imperialism in the region. The film deals with the Croats’ perception that Serb presence in Croatia is part of a sinister ploy to undermine Croatia’s statehood by forming a substantial non-Croat minority. In reality, the Serbs, desperate to escape Ottoman oppression, found themselves in the Krajina region of Croatia in the sixteenth century when the Habsburgs brought them in to act as *cordon sanitaire* against the Ottomans in exchange for land. In order to keep the two ethnic groups busy

with conflict and therefore less likely to politically emancipate themselves, Austria-Hungary made sure that the Croats' campaign for statehood in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was channeled against the "alien" Serb minority rather than against the Hungarians who actually dominated the Croats.<sup>294</sup> The creation of Yugoslavia in 1918 with a Serbian monarch as the head of state only deepened the Croat resentment of the Serbs.<sup>295</sup> After the NDH failed to eliminate the Serbs from Croatia, the establishment of the socialist Yugoslavia meant that Croats had to again "suffer" the Serbs who, although deeply resentful of the Croats, generally preferred reconciliation to revenge, and never demanded a special status within the republic in order to protect their interests. *Maternal Half-Brothers* suggests that the MASPOK revived Croat resentments of the Serb minority by employing a discourse of demonization disguised as democratization and caused an upsurge in anti-Serb rhetoric as well as in activity of the Croat "emigration" who saw this openly anti-Serb climate as a signal from their co-ethnics to provide support for the cause through terrorism.<sup>296</sup>

Loosely based on true events, *Dangerous Trail* focuses on Nafi and his mission to smuggle weapons into Yugoslavia to supply his fellow Albanian irredentists. On his journey, which takes him across Yugoslavia, the rakish Nafi befriends a naïve Belgrade waitress to whom he promises employment in Switzerland. A single mother desperate for work, Mila is easily manipulated, but after realizing that Nafi is devoted to the irredentist cause and does not hesitate

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<sup>294</sup> Glenny, *The Balkans*, 263.

<sup>295</sup> The clashes between Croat and Serb politicians were common in the "old" Yugoslavia, but it was not until the formation of the Ustashe movement in 1930 that Croat efforts to rid Croatia of the Serbs (and of Yugoslavia) took the form of terrorism including the assassination of the Yugoslav King Aleksandar in Marseille in 1934.

<sup>296</sup> This view was fairly common and difficult to dismiss as Serb paranoia because Ustashe sympathizers in the West continued with terrorist activities including assassinations of Yugoslav diplomats and hijackings of Yugoslav airplanes; they even staged incursions into Yugoslavia like the one by the so-called Bugojno Group in 1972 which sought to foment a popular Croat uprising and start an armed rebellion against the Yugoslav government.

to murder for it, she contacts the police who pursue Nafi and his associates around Kosovo and the neighbouring Macedonia. Nafi has Mila executed for her betrayal, but soon comes into conflict with his own family who see his political convictions as foolish and their Serb neighbours as having as much of a claim on Kosovo as they do. Nafi's uncle's auto repair shop, the irredentist group's safe house, is discovered by the police and raided. The group's ringleader, a local high school teacher, goes into hiding, but, as the film's final title card informs the viewer, he is "uncovered and arrested during irredentist demonstrations in Kosovo in March of 1981." Shortly after, Nafi is captured at the family home, and taken away by the police as his father watches from the window emotionlessly.

The subtext of *Dangerous Trail*, too, is foreign imperialism. The film deals unusually frankly with the Kosovo Albanians' hardly disguised aspirations to separate the autonomous province from Yugoslavia and join it with the so-called greater Albania. It taps into the fear, pervasive in Serbia, that the Albanian irredentists' campaign to drive the Serbs out, under the pretense of fighting oppression, was bringing those aspirations to fruition in the 1980s. This threat, the film suggests, must be eliminated because Kosovo's separation from Serbia and Yugoslavia would amount to a finalization of a fundamental historical injustice. The Serb historical memory supported the position that the Albanians gained a foothold in Kosovo owing primarily to the Ottoman conquest, prior to which the region had been almost completely populated by Serbs; the Ottomans had populated Kosovo with Albanians, a circumstance which, aided by high natality rates, now unfairly favoured the Albanians' claim to the region. The Albanian position was that, unlike the Serbs, they were autochthonous to the region. They saw Serbia as a hegemonic entity occupying Kosovo and sought to cleanse it of all Serbian presence which, the argument went, was a consequence of Slavic migration into what was from time

immemorial an Albanian territory. *Dangerous Trail* suggests that the 1974 Constitution which gave Kosovo autonomy, validated the Albanians' irredentism—itsself a validation of the consequences of Ottoman imperialism—and is therefore in conflict with Serbian national interests, and fundamentally incompatible with the values of “Brotherhood and Unity” on which Yugoslavia was built.

Socialist Yugoslavia's complicated “ethnic geography” was managed, Susan Woodward asserts, through “an extensive system of rights and overlapping sovereignties. Far from being repressed, national identity and rights were institutionalized—by the federal system, which granted near statehood to the republics, and by then multiple rights of national self-determination for individuals.”<sup>297</sup> *Dangerous Trail* implies that Yugoslavia's constitutional stability and territorial integrity can no longer be taken for granted precisely because of this system. It warns that the country has become a mess of “overlapping sovereignties” designed to accommodate whims of ethnic exceptionalisms which, in turn, virtually erased Yugoslavia as a legal entity.<sup>298</sup> More specifically and rather boldly, *Trail* suggests that this erasure of Yugoslavia encourages anti-Serb bias within both Kosovo's provincial and Yugoslavia's federal state institutions. Hinting that such a bias has become ingrained in Kosovo, the film depicts Albanian irredentists as integral to its institutions. The group's leader, email, is a high school teacher; one member belongs to the emergency medical service personnel while another is a police officer. As educators and civil servants presumed to be ethical and nonpartisan, they are able to go about their business of sabotaging the state without arousing suspicion. The motorcycle policeman, Musa, stops the traffic on a mountain pass so his cohorts can kill a hostage (a Serb truck driver

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<sup>297</sup> Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, 45.

<sup>298</sup> For a brief overview of the history behind the Serbs' and Albanians' claims to Kosovo, see Trbovich, *A Legal Geography*, 76-80.

who became suspicious and confronted Nafi in a motel parking lot near Belgrade) unobserved by pushing his truck off a cliff. The lone man alerted by the explosion does not call the police because the presence of an ambulance vehicle creates the impression for him that a road accident had occurred which has already been dealt with by emergency medical services. These depictions imply that Albanian irredentism is not reduced to the fringes of the society, but exists and functions unimpeded in the mainstream. *Dangerous Trail* suggests that Yugoslavia has so over-accommodated Albanian ethnic exceptionalism that even the institutions of the autonomous Kosovo are now utilized to drive the Kosovo Serbs out and so further the Albanian irredentist cause.

The film goes even further and takes the view, controversial in the 1980s, that Albanian irredentism is willfully ignored by the federal state because many of its officials, hoping to weaken Serbia and Yugoslavia, support the Albanian cause. Stamenkovi obliquely takes aim at the Slovene and Croat politicians who indeed routinely dismissed the then frequent both official and anecdotal reports of Albanian violence against the Kosovo Serbs as fabrications. They deemed such reports to be typically Serbian Machiavellianism designed to elicit sympathy for the Serbs as they go about the business of oppressing the Albanians who naively believed the Serbs' flimsy guarantees of autonomy. In an informal conversation with other investigators, one of the police inspectors searching for Nafi suggests that it is well known that Albanian irredentists frequently use violence and intimidation against the Serbs, but all he can do is "write reports" and ignore the complaints because "they tell me I am being too dramatic... Sometimes I think some here prefer things to be this way." The inspector's hardly veiled remark alludes to what was perhaps Serbia's main grievance in regards to Kosovo which was that the reports of the Serbs' gradual expulsion from the province were not being taken seriously and were even

regarded as paranoid hysteria by “some” federal state officials. The inspector’s words formulate an implicit lament of the downfall in 1966 of Aleksandar Ranković whose infamous hardline stance on Kosovo, many Serbs believed, would have curbed Albanian irredentism. *Dangerous Trail* seems to support the claim, admittedly somewhat paranoid and conspiratorial in tone, that Ranković, the champion of the strong central state that does not coddle nationalists or placate claims of ethnic exceptionalism, was removed from politics by Tito *precisely* to facilitate the easy expulsion of the Serbs from Kosovo.

*Dangerous Trail* affirms, however, that although Yugoslavia has been severely weakened by decentralization, Yugoslavism still exists, but urgently requires state protection from those who pursue narrow ethnically-inflected interests. As if to make sure its depiction of the Serb-Albanian dispute does not exclude others (or to draw others in, a cynic might argue), the film stresses that Kosovo is a Yugoslav, not just a Serbian problem, or, more specifically, that Albanian irredentists are a threat to all of Yugoslavia rather than just to Serbia. The transport trucks with a cache of weapons travel unhindered at night through virtually all of Yugoslavia. They enter the country at its northwestern-most point, at the border between Austria and Slovenia, and wind up in the capitol of Kosovo, Priština, in the southeast. The route symbolically suggests a terrorist threat to the whole country, but also lets the film implicitly question the apathetic attitude by the rest of Yugoslavia towards the plight of the Kosovo Serbs. The film seems to imply that because the individual republics rather than the federal state are increasingly in charge of their own affairs—including, especially, security—as if independent, it is easy for the irredentists to conduct their operations against the Serbs. *Dangerous Trail* subtly assigns blame for making the irredentists’ campaign logistically simple directly to decentralization which has made Yugoslavia into an increasingly loose “association of communities” in which



individual republics are concerned solely with their own affairs rather than with the common Yugoslav one. Yet, the film “confirms” Yugoslavia existence and its legitimacy. Although the irredentists are depicted as pathological Serb-haters who do not hesitate to kill for their cause, not every Albanian is an irredentist. Police inspector Ramiz is an Albanian, but also a Yugoslav who pursues the irredentists at the risk of being perceived as a traitor by his co-ethnics. Ramiz’s Yugoslavism and the pan-Yugoslav route of the transport trucks together symbolically suggest that although Yugoslavia *still* exists, if it is to survive, it must be consolidated rather than divided into ethnically-based administrative units with “near statehood,” insulated from one another and therefore prone to allowing those who would see Yugoslavia end easily put their plans into action.

In Zdravko Šotra’s *Maternal Half-Brothers*, too, Yugoslavia’s constitutional reforms account for how easily neighbours become enemies when ethnic resentments are validated by the state. Veselin’s recollections of his family’s history include the consequences of the controversial *Tenth Session of the Croatian League of Communists* of January 1970 at which Croatia’s delegates rose up against the perceived economic and political domination of Serbia. The *Tenth Session*, whose findings and decisions were given Tito’s approval, effectively provided state support for the spirit of the *Croatian Spring*. It echoed the movement’s aims when it concluded that Yugoslav unitarism must be curbed as it was far more dangerous than any ethnic nationalism and that Croats should assert their ethnic identity without fear of being labeled as nationalists.<sup>299</sup> In the film, Croats greet the findings and decisions of the *Tenth Session* with

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<sup>299</sup> *Croatian Spring* was eventually curbed for its overly nationalist rhetoric which included claims that the Serbs controlled Yugoslavia’s and Croatia’s power structures, that Yugoslavism was at best a passé whim and at worst a ploy designed to disappear Croatia’s cultural heritage by imposing Serbian culture on it (via, for example, the hybrid Serbo-Croatian language, and the synthetic Yugoslav culture), that profits from Croatia’s economy were being systematically syphoned off by the federal state in order to benefit Serbia’s economy. For a brief summary of the Croatian Spring, see Glenney, *The Balkans*, 590-593. See also Jović, *Yugoslavia*, 104-105.

nationalist elation tinged with both anti-Serb and anti-communist sentiments. In the village of Šmrekovo, “Our Beautiful Homeland,” the Croatian anthem dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century rings out. This comes across as a brazen act of defiance because, although used sporadically before it was officially reinstated as the Croatian national anthem in 1972, the song was a somewhat controversial symbol of re-emergence of Croat nationalism. Croatian flags *without* the communist red star are unfurled; posters and placards exclaim, “Long Live the Tenth Session!” and “Croatia for the Croats!” As the villagers listen to speeches about Croatian history, their Aryan heritage, the holiness of *their* God-given land, and the virtues of the Catholic faith, money is collected for the cause. *Maternal Half-Brothers* bluntly suggests that following the *Tenth Session*, which effectively upheld the tenets of the *Croatian Spring*, the kind of orgiastic nationalist revelry that previously would have been too dangerous to engage in publicly has become officially sanctioned. Šotra’s film proposes that by placating the Croats’ claims of ethnic exceptionalism, the state has made Croatia’s minority Serbs into scapegoats at the whim of the resurging Croat nationalists.

The Serbs of Kulina greet the results of the *Tenth Session* with dismay, believing that they not only confirm that Croats never had a genuine investment in Yugoslavia, but also that they set the stage for the return of the NDH. Ironically, as the Croats in Šmrekovo celebrate their ethnic heritage and stoke anti-Serb sentiments, the Kulina Serbs are gathered to help Braco’s and Veselin’s mother, Vranka, build a house. The only Croat woman in Kulina, Vranka begins the construction of a new house following the death of her second husband, Veselin’s father, Krstan. Her Serb neighbours who came to help her become agitated when, during the lunch break, busloads of flag-waving Croats go by and leaflets are dropped calling for the “non-Croats to leave Croatia.” Paranoia about the implications of the *Tenth Session* quickly ensues among those

gathered to help Vranka. Insinuating anti-Serb purges in the security echelons of Croatia, a former policeman rails about having been forced into retirement “because I’m a Serb!” Another man insists that Vranka who, ostracized because she married a Serb, has not been to Šmrekovo in years, is still “one of them and works for their cause.” When Vranka denies, the man, alluding to the fear of the return of the NDH and its genocidal ideology, retorts: “We came here to help you build a house and you are preparing us for slaughter.” The anger of the Serb men gathered to help Vranka only to be met with a display of Croat nationalist chauvinism symbolizes the Serb resentment of the seemingly state-sanctioned resurgence of nationalism in Croatia (as well as the Serbian alarmism which routinely exaggerated the NDH revival threat). The “house” which they helped build and naively believed was theirs, too, has now betrayed them. Šotra’s juxtaposition of the reactions to the *Tenth Session* in Šmrekovo and Kulina suggests that both Croats and Serbs saw decentralization, the *Croatian Spring* in particular, as a way of ridding Croatia of its Serb minority. Put differently, the juxtaposition sums up how the Croats and Serbs viewed centralized Yugoslavia: the former saw it is a prison preventing them from fully expressing their ethnic identity while for the latter it was a guarantee that the genocidal NDH would not return.

What made movements like the *Croatian Spring* particularly dangerous to Yugoslavia’s “Brotherhood and Unity” was that they inspired political agitation and even terrorism from ethnic nationalists among the Yugoslavs living outside of the country who saw such upheavals as an opportune time to destabilize Yugoslavia. The anti-Yugoslav activities of such groups and individuals fall under what Benedict Anderson describes as “long-distance nationalism” whereby the expatriates engage in propaganda campaigns, and provide funding and weapons for their cause, “all of which can have incalculable consequences in the zones of their ultimate

destinations.”<sup>300</sup> The so-called Yugoslav “emigration” consisted of individuals who left the country for ideological reasons in the years following World War II, claiming systemic repression of their ethnic group. Starting in the late 1960s, however, they were joined by economic migrants, following Yugoslavia’s decision to allow its citizens to look for work in the West as a way to alleviate unemployment at home.<sup>301</sup> Many of the economic migrants quickly fell under the influence of the “emigration” groups corresponding to their ethnicity and engaged in propaganda and terrorist activities against the Yugoslav state.<sup>302</sup> Both *Dangerous Trail* and *Maternal Half-Brothers* tap into the anxieties regarding “long-distance nationalism”—the activities of Yugoslavs living in the West who saw their ethnic group as disenfranchised and aimed to affect corrective change to the country’s political system. While Braco belongs to the original “emigration” who left almost exclusively for ideological reasons, Nafi is from the later wave of economic migrants who were mostly indoctrinated into anti-Yugoslavism upon arrival at their destinations. The discontent and nationalist zeal of both, however, is seemingly so strong

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<sup>300</sup> Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons*, 74.

<sup>301</sup> In 1968, West Germany and Yugoslavia re-established diplomatic relations, and agreed that both skilled and unskilled workers from Yugoslavia can flow freely towards West Germany which desperately needed workers to sustain its economic growth. As political science scholar William Zimmerman points out, this development was an important feature of Yugoslavia’s own brand of “third way” socialism: “By the late 1960s, the Yugoslavs had raised the notion of open borders to the level of state policy. Rather than a stance of tolerance or resignation, the open border policy had come to be identified in official utterances as one of the key defining features, along with market socialism and self-management, of what was distinct and positive in the Yugoslav socialist variant and element that set off Yugoslavia from the Soviet model.” Zimmerman, *Open Borders*, 76.

<sup>302</sup> The Yugoslav ambassador to Sweden was assassinated by Croat nationalists in Stockholm in 1971; a Yugoslav Air Transport airplane en route from Stockholm to Belgrade was brought down by a bomb placed in the cargo by Croat nationalists in 1972; in 1979, a Serb nationalist hijacked an airplane in the US, with intention of having the pilot commandeer it into a government building in Belgrade, before getting arrested by the FBI; Yugoslavia was infiltrated by a group of Croats who attempted to start an armed rebellion against the Yugoslav authorities and a fight for Croatian independence in 1972. For more on the activities of the “emigration,” including their influence on the economic migrants, see Milo Bošković, *Antijugoslovenska fašistička emigracija* (Beograd: Sloboda, 1980), Sreten Kovačević, *Hronologija antijugoslovenskog terorizma 1960-1980* (Beograd: IŠRO, 1981), Milenko Doder, *Jugoslovenska neprijateljska emigracija* (Zagreb: Centar za informacije i publicitet, 1989), Zlatko Skrbušić, *Long-Distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 1999), Vladimir Ivanović, “Ekstremna imigracija u SR Nemačkoj i Jugoslavija,” *Istorija 20. veka* 27, no. 1 (2009): 139-146.

that they feel compelled to stage terrorist attacks on their perceived enemies inside of Yugoslavia in order to aid what they see as their co-ethnic's righteous struggle for political and national emancipation.

In his recordings, Veselin recalls a mysterious and dangerous forest fire that broke out on mount Dinara, close to Kulina, as the Serbs sulked and the Croats rejoiced following the *Tenth Session*. In his response to Veselin, Braco reveals that the fire was an arson he committed when he infiltrated the country after twelve years away. Broadly, the fire on the slopes of Dinara is symbolic of the escalation of discord between the Serbs and Croats. More specifically, it implies that the *Croatian Spring* inspired “long-distance nationalism” of the “emigration” and was synchronized with their efforts to intimidate the Krajina Serbs. Yet, as if to not appear overly harsh in its judgement, the film offers a depiction of Braco's life in Austria that reminds the viewer that “long-distance nationalism” is, after all, a Western import by default, and so symbolically shifts some of the blame for it from Braco and others like him onto the West itself. With his terrorist years behind him, Braco appears to have a soul-crushingly lonely existence in Austria. In his recordings to Veselin, he reveals that he is happiest when in the company of his employer's dogs or prostitutes. As he describes into the tape recorder the memories of his mother Vranka and father Antiša, Braco is interrupted by his boss who reminds him his job is to mind the dogs, not to absently reminisce, and even calls him “a piece of shit.” The film suggests that Braco never integrated into Austria, in turn, symbolically implying that leaving Yugoslavia for the West to escape socialism was a mistake because the Western capitalist alternative is inherently hostile and uncaring, and can never make for a nurturing home.

This depiction of Braco's isolation symbolizes the price to be paid for senseless ethnic nationalism. *Half-Brothers* suggests a complete disappearance of Yugoslavism among the

expatriates who, instead of nurturing “Brotherhood and Unity” and strengthening their ties precisely because they are among strangers, live in adversarial “Yugoslav” sub-communities, segregated according to ethnicity. In a letter establishing contact with Veselin, Braco points out that he had found out about Veselin’s crime after reading a story about it in “one of your magazines.” Braco is, of course, referring to a Yugoslav magazine read *only* by the Serbs in Austria. His remark implies that Yugoslavs in Austria soothe their nostalgia for home strictly with cultural products coded as *their own*.<sup>303</sup> Yet, that Braco now reads what he thinks of as a Serbian magazine means that he has reconsidered the wisdom of his “long-distance nationalism” and so symbolically implies that the Yugoslavs’ ethnic segregation can be overcome and even the most hardline nationalists reformed. The film’s depiction of Braco deftly alludes to the somewhat paranoid anxiety, palpable in Yugoslavia, that the West, because it is antagonistic to socialism, manufactures “long-distance nationalism” among the Yugoslavs who go there in search of work in order to destabilize Yugoslavia. By keeping the Yugoslavs unintegrated into their host societies and in isolated ethnic groupings, the West, *Half-Brothers* implies, fosters rejection of a common Yugoslav culture among the “emigration” and provides the staging ground for terrorist actions against the Yugoslav state.

*Dangerous Trail*, too, implies that, as an incubator for “long-distance nationalism,” the West destabilizes Yugoslavia whose own political and economic reform, which resulted in an openness towards the West, is a catalysts for this process because it allows for easy importation of extremism into the country. On the pretense of carrying frozen meat, a Belgian transport truck

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<sup>303</sup> Notably, it is after Braco engages with the Other’s cultural product that Veselin’s crime, which, significantly, takes place in a hotel called “Yugoslavia,” facilitates the contact between the two half-brothers. Braco, who admits to being severely shaken up upon seeing his half-brother’s picture in the magazine, is also somewhat impressed by Veselin’s actions: “You took revenge our way.” Fittingly, the impulse to take revenge is what connects the two half-brothers and, symbolically, the Serbs and Croats—a senseless violent act in a fit of vengeful teen rage in a hotel called “Yugoslavia” suggests that the inability to refrain from revenge for historical wrongs (and to live peacefully in a common state) is, ironically, the commonality that binds the Serbs and Croats.

containing weapons easily enters Yugoslavia. Even the ostensibly beneficial easing of trade restrictions with the West, the film asserts, automatically results in a less safe Yugoslavia because the West's true intentions are to undermine the country. This porousness of the country's borders with the West which allows the likes of Nafi to easily enter the country symbolically suggests that Yugoslavia is no longer in charge of its own destiny. Like *Half-Brothers*, *Trail* implies that the West cultivates anti-Yugoslavism among the "emigration" and provides concrete assistance for its terrorist endeavours. Belgium is assumed to be the location from which the Albanian irredentists plan terrorist operations against Yugoslavia and acquire the financial resources to further their cause.<sup>304</sup> Nafi feels deeply betrayed by his brother, Rahman, because Rahman, to whom Nafi has been sending money from Belgium with which to cheaply buy the houses of the Serbs fleeing Kosovo, has not been making the purchases and even holds the view that Kosovo is "*theirs*, too." Ironically, Rahman, who still lives in Kosovo, is unable to perceive the Serb "oppression" which Nafi, who lives in Belgium, seems to see everywhere. Benedict Anderson points out that the long-distance nationalist "hero" is "radically unaccountable" because he acts from the safety of another state.<sup>305</sup> His father, Hasan, begs Nafi to come back to Kosovo and live a normal life, but Nafi rejects the idea because in the West he can be a "hero" to his co-ethnics without having to worry about the Yugoslav police. Unlike Rahman and Hasan who *have to* live with the Serbs, Nafi can afford to antagonize them because he is able to do it from afar and so remain "unaccountable." Like *Maternal Half-Brothers* then, *Dangerous Trail* implies that decentralization has led not to democratization or to a more just

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<sup>304</sup> The film implicates the West in subtle ways as well. French, the language of their host country, is the main language spoken by the irredentists; Roper, the irredentists' Peugeot-driving Belgian henchman hardly has a personal investment in the Albanian cause, yet does not hesitate to kill for it (Because he is too suave for a common hired criminal, and possesses impressive skills, Roper's involvement with the irredentists can be seen as symbolic of Western involvement in the process of destabilization of Yugoslavia.).

<sup>305</sup> Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons*, 74.

society but to an escalation of ethnic nationalism and to formation of nearly independent nation states within Yugoslavia. The film suggests that, as a consequence, the country is now unable to control who moves about its territory or even to secure its borders against those who would infiltrate it from the West to commit acts of terrorism and incite further ethnic discord.

The Rules of the Game: “Those Who Arrived Last Must Leave”

*Dangerous Trail* asserts that Albanian irredentism is driven by the firm conviction that Albanians are autochthonous to the region while the Serbs are Slavic latecomers who must be made to leave. The film implies that such beliefs, which gained full affirmation in World War II, when the Albanians organized themselves into a collaborationist militia, the Ballists, and persecuted the Kosovo Serbs, have not been sufficiently discouraged after the war and have now been passed onto the younger generations to provide historical “justification” for the Albanians’ claims of full “ownership” of Kosovo. Nafi’s father, Hasan, confronts his own brother, Šaban, whose auto body shop is the base for the irredentists and the place where the weapons and propaganda materials are kept, about his influence on Nafi. Hasan demands that Šaban refrain from indoctrinating Nafi further into the irredentist cause. Šaban is disappointed that his brother “works against his own people” and makes it clear to Hasan that the irredentists view as enemies those Albanians who do not share their ideological beliefs: “If you are not with us, you are against us.” Hasan’s reply, “That’s what Ballists used to say during the occupation,” not only points to his firm allegiance to Yugoslavism and to his opposition to irredentism, but also implies parity between the Ballists of World War II and Albanian irredentists of the 1980s. Angry and fearing for his son’s safety, Hasan reminds Šaban, who *was* a Ballist, that the authorities spared him after the war only because they trusted that he was not genuinely fascist, but rather temporarily poisoned by fascist influences. Hasan is disgusted that Šaban has cunningly kept



quiet all these years about his true nature, but Šaban is unmoved: “To us, *this* is occupation.”

*Dangerous Trail* suggests that Albanian irredentism should have been methodically suppressed by the state after the war because it has now grown even more extreme, threatening the country’s already fragile ethnic unity by perpetuating the view that Yugoslavia is an occupying state and the Serbs alien trespassers on Albanian land.

Similarly, *Maternal Half-Brothers* calls attention to the notion, prevalent among the Croats especially since Yugoslavia’s inception, that Croatia must be ethnically and religiously homogenous. This task, which of course meant that the Orthodox Serbs who came to Croatia at the invitation of the Habsburgs and made parts of Croatia their home, must be killed, Croatized or expelled, began to be carried out by the Ustashe during World War II. The film’s depiction of the beginnings of this genocidal campaign in the Krajina region suggests that it was the treatment of the Serbs in Croatia of the fascist NDH era that poisoned the relations between the Serbs and the Croats in the “new” Yugoslavia because the seeds of enmity sown then sprouted later. In the film, as soon as the “old” Yugoslavia is dissolved and the NDH established, Ustashe on mount Dinara begin the process of ethnic consolidation using rhetoric that implies that the Serbs have always cunningly exploited their Croat neighbours. This rhetoric sounds remarkably like that of the *Croatian Spring* decades later that so angers the Serbs helping Vranka build her house, allowing the film to suggest that the movement is at least somewhat inspired by the NDH ideology. In one of his recordings, Braco recalls Ustashe spreading rumours among the Šmrekovo Croats about how the Serbs from Kulina have consistently been stealing from them. In front of the gathered villagers, the Ustashe officer Šimi proclaims that there is no room for both the Orthodox “schismatics” and the Catholic Croats on mount Dinara: “Those who arrived last must leave.” Met with an enthusiastic response, the Ustashe soon begin to recruit soldiers from

Šmrekovo by offering food to those who sign up for the Home Guard, the armed forces of the NDH, enticing the naïve Antiša, Vranka's then husband and Braco's father, who signs up and becomes a gunner stationed in the steeple of the local Catholic church.

*Maternal Half-Brothers* proposes that, although irrational, the “long-distance nationalism” of the Croat “emigration” can be partially blamed on the state itself for not dealing with the Serbs’ post-war revanchism more resolutely. Benedict Anderson points out that the long-distance nationalist is not only “radically unaccountable” but his politics “are deeply rooted in a consciousness that his exile is self-chosen.”<sup>306</sup> It is this precisely this awareness that gives Braco's “long-distance nationalism” an aura of sacrifice, and an added zeal. *Maternal Half-Brothers* allows that Braco's predicament was somewhat difficult because of his father's Home Guard affiliation during World War II. It suggests that it was the stigmatization he experienced in the “new” Yugoslavia by the victorious Partisans, who were predominantly Serbs, that set Braco on the path to radicalization and ultimately caused him to choose exile. Braco is ostracized as a child and often reminded that his father was an Ustashe until he begins to not only resent the jibes, but to glorify his father's death.<sup>307</sup> When a local Serb police officer calls him “the son of an Ustashe,” Braco, then still a boy, carefully examines the man and asks Vranka if “they” killed his father. It is at that moment that Braco goes symbolically “blind” to the Ustashe war crimes, begins to blame the Serbs for his father's death, and becomes susceptible to Croat nationalist propaganda. Before long, Braco acquires the view, identical to how Nafi and Šaban see Kosovo, that Croatia is under Serb “occupation.” Braco's escape from Yugoslavia and subsequent terrorist activity, however, seem to have a rather thin justification as he experienced no actual

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<sup>306</sup> Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons*, 74.

<sup>307</sup> Antiša was a Croatian Home Guard soldier, not an Ustashe, but very few would have cared to make the distinction which is analogous to that between a German Waffen-SS soldier and a Wehrmacht soldier.

persecution, only hectoring. Šotra's film implies that the Serbs' resentments of the Croats following the war may have crossed into a domineering conduct, and maybe even received a tacit approval by the state, implying that perhaps *some* of the concerns of the *Croatian Spring* were valid. Yet, the rationale behind Braco's exile—his mythical sacrifice for the Croat cause—seems not necessitated by post-war maltreatment, but simply derived from the already existing Ustashe nationalist fantasies which exaggerated the Serbs' equally mythical villainy.

In the film, the local authorities, consisting predominantly of the Serbs who manned most of the Partisan units in the region, deal with the remnants of the Ustashe forces hiding in the caves of mount Dinara even as late as 1947. They are wary of the local Croats whom they suspect of helping the Ustashe soldiers still holding out. The last Ustashe band, led by Šimi , prowls the area demanding that the Croats provide them with food. When Vranka refuses, Šimi proclaims that Ustashe rule is not over and pledges to Vranka that Braco, who is quietly observing the scene through a half-opened door, “belongs to us, and we will raise him to be a proper Ustashe when he grows up.” Frightened of losing Braco, Vranka goes to the authorities and tells them where Šimi is hiding. Šimi soon gets killed and Vranka is publicly given the credit for his revealing his whereabouts, making her a pariah among the Croats who burn her house down in revenge. With no other choice left, Vranka and Braco move in with Krstan, a local Serb communist official whom Vranka eventually marries and with whom she has Veselin. This ethnic “switch” from Croat to Serb does not bother Vranka whose ethnic identity seems fluid, but never quite takes in Braco who, years later in his recordings to Veselin, refers to Krstan's house as “your house” and expresses regret that, following her death, Vranka was buried in a Serbian Orthodox cemetery.

Ironically, Šimi's vow to Vranka comes true while Braco is serving in the Yugoslav National Army—the cornerstone and guarantor of Yugoslavia's "Brotherhood and Unity"—implying that the state itself contributed to the transformation of misfits like Braco into rabid nationalists. In one of his recordings to Veselin, Braco recalls having to shoulder the implicit burden of culpability attached by the society to those who had an association with the Ustashe via a family member. As a young man, Braco is bitter, but still not fully poisoned by the Ustashe ideology and, though her parents ultimately do not allow it because "his father was an Ustashe," even appears prepared to marry a local Serb girl, Anica. Shortly before their doomed romance ends, Anica comes to visit Braco, a conscript in the Army and serving as a dog-handler near the Austrian border, when he bitterly complains to her: "They stationed me in the worst possible place because of my father." Later on, suspecting that his father is the reason why he is so often forced by the officers to do manual labour around the barracks, Braco confides in a fellow Croat recruit, Josip, that his father was an Ustashe, killed by the Partisans. Josip admits that his father, too, was an Ustashe, killed by the Chetniks. Josip's initial response to Braco's admission, "I had a feeling," and his assertion that "we will always be blamed for everything," hints that it is precisely the sense that they are being unduly blamed for their fathers' sins that makes them into allies and causes them to begin plotting their escape to Austria. Though he *chooses* exile, the state places Braco in the military service near the Austrian border and trains him as a dog-handler—a skill that later enables Braco to get a job in Austria—almost as if preparing him for it. Braco's willingness to marry Anica even implies a resistance to ethnic nationalism, but the society and the state have already pegged him for an Ustashe (or perhaps even made him into one) and so predestined him for a life in the "emigration." The state antagonizes Braco by never letting him forget whose son he is. It is almost out of spite that he begins to mythologize and

glorify the Ustashe legacy and to find inspiration in the unfinished business they started in World War II. Like Nafi and Šaban, he soon commits his life to the project of making the Serb “latecomers” leave the territory claimed by his own people.

#### Restorative Nostalgia: (Flash)back to the Way We Used to Be

Nostalgia as a cultural phenomenon in Europe came into being in the seventeenth century owing to the “greatly improved means of transportation” which enabled travel far away from home and, in turn, facilitated extreme homesickness.<sup>308</sup> The opening of Yugoslav borders which allowed citizens to seek work elsewhere had a similar effect, but the brand of nostalgia often generated among the Yugoslav expatriates was the *restorative* nostalgia. This nostalgia, shared by the expatriates and their co-ethnics in the homeland, was for a particular moment in the past when the society was organized according to the principles valued by the ethnic group engaging in it and it aimed to bring about a return of that mythical past. Both *Dangerous Trail* and *Maternal Half-Brothers* suggest that this project to bring back the past is one into which new generations are easily indoctrinated as well as one that requires a disavowal of the more undecorous and discreditable aspects of that past. *Half-Brothers* specifically addresses the perception, common among the Croats, that the Serbs had cunningly inflated the scope of the Ustashe crimes against them (or perhaps even invented them altogether). Aided by this historical falsehood, and having usurped leadership positions in politics and culture, the argument went, the Serb minority in Croatia set out to exact revenge by delegitimizing Croatia’s statehood and clipping the wings of Croat culture at every turn. A denial of the extent of the Ustashe crimes against the Serbs is integral to Braco’s ability to see the Ustashe as fighters for Croatia’s freedom whose legacy he is now obligated to uphold. Braco’s views mirror the Croats’ *restorative*

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<sup>308</sup> Jean Starobinski, “The Idea of Nostalgia,” *Diogenes* 14, no. 54 (1966): 101-102.

nostalgia, encouraged by the *Croatian Spring*, but re-emerging in the 1980s, for the NDH era which “remembers” the Ustashe not as ruthless killers the Serbs allege them to have been but simply as enabling Croatia to be charge of its own fate—better able make the alien Serbs compliant.

Braco’s nostalgia for the NDH era is a *restorative* nostalgia which, like a metaphor, pits the glorious past against the corrupt present and, in a case of what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as “historical inversion,” finds the ideal to be realized in the future to already exist in the past.<sup>309</sup> It is based on Braco’s childhood recollections of the Ustashe officer Šimi’s stories about the thieving “schismatics” who must leave Croatia because they “arrived last.” Through his terrorist activities, Braco aims to rid Croatia of the Serbs and so complete the project of the NDH. As the film’s flashback structure implies, however, his memories and therefore his knowledge of that time are rather sketchy. Braco remembers clearly that Antiša’s heavy machine gun was placed in the church steeple, but does not realize that the location also provided a clear view of the site of the extermination of the Kulina Serbs by the Ustashe. With the help of the Home Guard soldiers, the Ustashe gather the Serb men and take them to the nearby pit hidden in Dinara’s austere landscape dotted with limestone rocks, but clearly visible from Antiša’s position in the church steeple. Antiša and Vranka, who had stopped by to bring him lunch, watch in horror as the Kulina Serbs are being killed one by one with a mallet blow to the head and then thrown into the pit. Grappling with the implications of the atrocity he is witnessing, the good-natured Antiša, who intrinsically understands that there is no point in hating one’s neighbours whatever their ethnicity, humbly tells Vranka that the Serbs being killed are “no different from me.”

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<sup>309</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Towards a Historical Poetics,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 147.

Similarly, some Albanians, like Nafi's father and brother, want to live peacefully with their Serb neighbours, but too many others have been poisoned by the hawkish chauvinism of Albanian irredentists that continues to proliferate because it had not been rooted out after the war. This prejudice, which seeps into the psyche of the younger generations, is personified in the character of Nafi's uncle Šaban whose indoctrination of Nafi is driven by the same kind of *restorative* nostalgia that drives Braco. Šaban, who fondly remembers the World War II era when the Ballists were busy eliminating the Serb presence in Kosovo, has managed to convince Nafi to choose exile and to engage in irredentism. By contrasting the influence on Nafi of Hasan, a former Partisan with that of Šaban, a former Ballist, *Dangerous Trail* alludes to the dilemma, facing not just the Kosovo Albanians, but other Yugoslavs as well of having to choose between regressing into some pseudo-glorious, ethnically pristine fascist past, and a peaceful coexistence based on the socialist principles of "Brotherhood and Unity." Nafi chooses the former, but as a long-distance nationalist, he is unaware of just how devastating the impact of his choice is on the two ethnic communities at home. Hasan is shocked when Nafi cynically laughs off his concerns that the stoking of anti-Serb hatred has resulted in the rape of a Serbian nun and in routine desecration of gravestones in the Serbs' cemeteries. Rahman, also outraged at Nafi's callousness, suggests that Nafi is nothing, but a fascist, and pledges that their village will remain united, with Albanians and Serbs living together. Seemingly offended, Nafi rejects the fascist label and makes his own sinister vow in response: "We will disunite it then." Duped by his uncle into believing that irredentism is about fighting for freedom from Serb oppression, Nafi disavows the fact that it is, in fact, a continuation of—and functions to bring back—the genocidal Ballist ideology of World War II.

Braco's recollections of Antiša's and Vranka's genuine shock at witnessing the execution of the Kulina Serbs, and especially Antiša's remark that the Serbs are "no different from me," is similarly contrasted, in *Maternal Half-Brothers*, with Braco's view of the Ustashe as fighters for Croatia's freedom from Serb oppression. Maureen Turim suggests that in mediating between the present and the past, flashbacks have the ability to unsettle "the conceptual foundations of history in its relationship to narrative and narrative in its relationship to history."<sup>310</sup> *Maternal Half-Brothers* uses the inherently subjective nature of flashbacks to deny credibility to the historical memory and to the narrative it produced which serves as the foundation for Braco's *restorative* nostalgia. Because he is only capable of his own subjective view, Braco is ignorant of the larger truth that the flashbacks objectively affirm for the viewer. Braco's recollections of the Serbs being killed, although a part of his flashback, by his own admission come from Vranka's memories, presumably related to him later on. Braco, still just a boy at the time, *does not* witness the killings himself because Vranka and Antiša do not allow him to come up to the church steeple so as not to traumatize him. Like Nafi, Braco *is* eventually made aware by his family of the full story, but rejects the aspects of it that shame and inculcate his own ethnic group. Braco cannot accept that Croats committed heinous and completely unprovoked crimes against the Serbs in World War II because to do so would challenge the narrative, needed to justify Croat nationalism, of intolerable Serb oppression which necessitated the rise of the NDH. What Braco remembers first-hand, however, is looking for his father's remains among the protruding limestones of Dinara after Antiša is killed by the Partisans, and his mother Vranka gathering the sun-bleached bones in a sack and burying them. Braco chooses to assign meaning to this macabre memory and to disregard anything that might in any way qualify it and disrupt the

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<sup>310</sup> Turim, *Flashbacks in Film*, 1-2.



construction of a historical narrative in which the Serbs are villains who killed his hero father. Consequently, like Nafi, Braco has no sympathy for the Serbs. He sees the stories of the Ustashe crimes against the Serbs simply as propaganda and, ironically, never heeds his father's counsel that the Serbs "are no different from me."

Alluding to the 1980s trend of finding justification for self-righteous jingoism in half-true narratives woven from flimsy accounts of historical trauma, *Maternal Half-Brothers*, through its flashback structure, suggests that it is by choice that Braco does not accept that the Serbs are "no different" from him. That Braco, at end of the film, returns to Yugoslavia not having achieved his goal of bringing back the time in history he venerates symbolizes the absurdity of regressive sociopolitical perspectives of ethnic nationalism that plagued Yugoslavia. The film affirms what, sadly, bore repeating in the 1980s, which is that the NDH is an ugly edifice of the past, not an ideal to aspire to in the future. Ultimately then, the film morphs Braco's *restorative* nostalgia into a *reflective* nostalgia which admits the "irrevocability of the past," is itself "inconclusive and fragmentary," and can therefore be instructive in a more objective assessment of the relationship between the past and present.<sup>311</sup> As Svetlana Boym points out, *reflective* nostalgia "reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, as reflective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgement or critical reflection."<sup>312</sup> Braco's return to Yugoslavia, especially his embrace of Veselin in the prison yard, symbolically validates Yugoslavia and repudiates the ideology of the NDH. Presumably upon *reflection* sparked by his reconnection with Veselin, Braco has re-evaluated his worldview and renounced "long-distance nationalism." More broadly then, by suggesting that his self-chosen exile has failed to provide Braco with

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<sup>311</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 49, 50.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid. 49-50.

comfort because it has made him aim for unattainable goals, the film implies that anti-Yugoslav agenda of the “emigration,” rooted in insubstantial historical justifications, is unattainable.

Although both *Dangerous Trail* and *Maternal Half-Brothers* implicitly affirm the validity of the Yugoslav state, they also imply that the notion of “Brotherhood and Unity” has always been somewhat of an unattainable ideal. The films deal with the way the already deeply troubling ethnic tensions were exacerbated by the activities of the Yugoslavs living abroad who viewed the Yugoslav state as illegitimate, and actively worked to undermine it in order to “free” their co-ethnics from its clutches. *Dangerous Trail* openly addresses the notion that Kosovo Albanians, the largest non-Slavic minority in the country, never warmed up to the Yugoslav idea. The film implies that owing to its decentralized nature—the myriad of accommodations meant to appease those ethnic groups who claimed to have been denied their rights—and its openness towards the West, the Yugoslav state was vulnerable to sabotage by the “emigration” working from, and even *with*, the West. The film traces the lineage of Albanian irredentism to the Ballists, the Albanian Nazi collaborators who terrorized the Serbs in World War II, suggesting that the fascist legacy of that war had not been extinguished. Crucially, the film points to a serious discord within the Yugoslav federation by alluding to the differences in how the Kosovo problem was viewed within Yugoslavia. For the Serbs, the irredentist campaign to ethnically cleanse Kosovo, and sever it from Serbia and Yugoslavia, was a matter of survival that needed to be dealt with resolutely. For others, the Serbs’ grievances were a tactical exaggeration meant to strengthen the argument for re-centralization and so help entrench the Serb domination of Yugoslavia. Though the irredentists’ weapons smuggling operation is foiled and Serbia’s (and Yugoslavia’s) constitutional and territorial integrity symbolically affirmed, the title card at the film’s conclusion informs the viewer that the infamous March 1981 demonstrations are yet to come and

so implies that the true events depicted in the film are only a prelude to a more comprehensive plot to break apart both Serbia and Yugoslavia likely to soon unfold in reality.

Like *Dangerous Trail*, *Maternal Half-Brothers* deals with the anxieties about the “emigration,” especially regarding how its activities synced up with internal political movements like the *Croatian Spring* in order to invalidate the Yugoslav idea as a Serbian ploy to rule others. In doing so, the film brings into dialogue two opposing views: the Serbs’ position that the Croats are nostalgic for the NDH and waiting for an opportune moment to carry on with extermination of the Serbs commenced in World War II, and the Croat view that the Serbs have always been busy plotting how to sideline Croatia and hinder the Croats’ economic, cultural and political interests. *Maternal Half-Brothers* implies an ideological lineage between the rise of nationalism in Croatia, evident in movements like the MASPOK, and Croatia’s past as a Nazi satellite state. The film depicts the *Croatian Spring* as fuelled by anti-Serb paranoia and an irrational resentment of the Serb presence in Croatia, especially in politics and culture, and as aimed at creating not a more democratic, but an ethnically clean Croatia. The film concludes, however, on a somewhat hopeful note which validates the Yugoslav state. Although “destined” to be enemies, the two half-brothers, whose tragic personal narratives are enmeshed with equally tragic historical ones, tearfully embrace, symbolically endorsing the precarious Yugoslav “Brotherhood and Unity.”

Horrors Yet to Come: Finessing the Genre in *Déjà vu*

Go on—remember everything.

—Bobika, *Déjà vu*

Seen to be shallow and in bad taste, even at the height of their popularity in the 1980s slasher horror films remained firmly on the fringes of Hollywood. The graphic violence depicted

in the films was thought to facilitate male fantasies of sadistic aggression against women via mechanisms of spectator identification inherent in the film-viewing experience. The slashers were often accused by the critics of propping up the oppressive patriarchal morality and so facilitating a backlash against feminism among their target audience: young men.<sup>313</sup> Some critics and scholars disagreed with this assessment and suggested that slasher films provided, however opaquely, a politically progressive alternative. Unbound by the prohibitive etiquette of the mainstream public sphere, the films' very transgressions functioned to vent the otherwise repressed content by giving it radically subversive outlets. Robin Wood suggests that, although often ideologically untidy, many 1970s American horror films channel anxieties that are "the logical product of patriarchal capitalism."<sup>314</sup> These anxieties are caused, Wood goes on to say, by various "predetermined roles" the system insists the citizens play which require repression of our true selves in order for the pillars of the system like patriarchy, monogamy, heterosexuality, and capitalism to be enacted.<sup>315</sup> Precisely because their politics are often nearly unintelligible and they tend not to be taken seriously by the larger public, "innocuous" genres like horror "can be far more radical," Wood suggests, in how they rebuke the system than those films whose politics are lucid and consistent and which often unwittingly prop up at least some aspect the system.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> In an episode of their show dedicated entirely to debates around the subject, film critics Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert discuss depictions of violence against women in the slashers. Siskel calls slashers "a depressing development in American movies" within which violence against women is "grotesquely routine," and suggests that the trend is a "primordial response" by men to "the growth of the women's movement in the last decade." *Sneak Previews*, "Extreme Violence Directed at Women," (originally aired on WTTW Chicago September, 18 1980).

<sup>314</sup> Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, 64.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 70.

For Wood, it is indeed the ideological “incoherence” of horror films that speaks most eloquently about “the quandary of a civilization.”<sup>317</sup>

A subdued interpretation of the American slasher horror films of the 1970s and 1980s, Goran Marković's *Déjà vu* transplants most of the genre's tropes, and with them the ideological “incoherence,” into the Yugoslav context. While *Déjà vu* is more politically astute than the films from which it derives, its indictment of its own sociopolitical context is made somewhat ambiguous by the trappings of the genre. Most of the film takes place in the early 1970s, and focuses on Mihailo, once a promising concert pianist, now an anxiety-ridden loner. Although he no longer plays the instrument, Mihailo teaches piano at a night school grandiosely named “Workers’ University.” The skulking Mihailo has been traumatized by a series of events, incorporated into the narrative as nightmarish flashbacks, which occurred in his childhood and adolescence. Still just a boy, Mihailo witnesses his mother attempt suicide following a divorce from his womanizing father. A few years later, deeply attached to his mother, the teenage Mihailo is devastated when he is unable to be with his mother in her final moments when, presumably stricken by cancer, she dies an agonizing death. Shortly after World War II ends, Mihailo's father, a professional actor, is sentenced to death for treason by the new communist government because he and his troupe continued working after the Nazis had occupied Belgrade. Much of the family property is swiftly nationalized with one half of the family apartment going to Stole, an abrupt and eager UDBA operative on whose testimony Mihailo's father was convicted. Decades later, Mihailo still shares the apartment with Stole, now bitter that he has been let go by the UDBA following the fall of Ranković, and his family, and must endure Stole's frequent drunken rants seeping in from behind the French door dividing the apartment. Mihailo

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 63.

finds solace with the oversexed Olgica, a fashion modeling instructor at “Workers’ University,” who is desperate to escape her own grim reality of near-poverty. Mihailo’s world begins to unravel, however, when Olgica’s presence triggers vivid childhood memories and Mihailo’s present starts to uncannily parallel his past as if repeating it. Olgica, livid when Mihailo suffers from stage fright and cannot perform Chopin’s “Revolutionary Étude” at an important function she organizes in order to ingratiate herself to the officials of the local branch of the League of Communists, leaves Mihailo for a new man. Realizing that Olgica never loved him, Mihailo mentally snaps and goes on a killing spree inside Olgica’s house, massacring Olgica, her new lover, and her father as Olgica’s younger brother observes the carnage from the shadows.

Robin Wood points out that horror monsters are often “products of the family.”<sup>318</sup> Like most slashers, *Déjà vu* appears to position its main character’s psychosis as directly resulting from an Oedipal aberration in his psychosexual development: festering anger explodes into violence when Olgica, Mihailo’s chosen mother-surrogate, fails to meet the criteria of the ideal Mihailo wishes her to fulfill. The film’s adherence to this quintessential slasher trope, however, is misleading. It is the state who initiates Mihailo into “monsterhood” by breaking apart his vaguely bourgeois family of artists for dubious ideological reasons and then inserting into it Stole, himself unstable because the state has “betrayed” him, who exacerbates Mihailo’s anguish until he violently lashes out. Broadly, Mihailo’s predicament and neurosis can be said to metaphorize the anxieties of the Yugoslavs no longer able to play their “predetermined roles” and perform happy socialism while (squeezed by the 1980s economic crisis) rapidly losing belief in the Yugoslav idea. As Daniel Goulding puts it, Mihailo’s “repressive psychological structure” is linked “with larger forms of political and social repression” and “evokes the possibility of

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<sup>318</sup> Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, 76.

repetitive and imitative cycles of violence erupting at both the individual and societal level when life is lived within rigid authoritarian and repressive structures.”<sup>319</sup> Yet, what hazily emerges when this broad critique of Yugoslav socialism is more closely examined is an indictment of the dynamics of Yugoslav ethnic identity politics of the 1980s which revolved around mining of history for unacknowledged injustices and scapegoating the “enemy” ethnic groups who (may or may not have) committed them. Though *Déjà vu* never explicitly introduces the ethnic dimension, Mihailo’s neurosis, rooted in a traumatic past, takes him from a sheepish victim to a raging monster who takes the lives of innocents he perceives as guilty, and so *uncannily* mirrors the Yugoslav sociopolitical dynamics which encouraged “repetitive and imitative cycles of violence” in the 1980s and saw them to fruition in the 1990s.

Yugoslav politicians, public intellectuals, historians, and journalists spent the 1980s discussing the historical traumas and mythologizing the victimhood of their own ethnos, and, in retrospect it is easy to assert, fueled ethnic resentments and encouraged revenge. The heated debates stoked the fires of chauvinism and helped give rise to rampant paranoia and, in turn, to nationalist leaders who, as Yugoslavia expired in the early 1990s, used their co-ethnics’ fear of their “enemies” to grab (or retain) power in their home republics. In retrospect, this morbid public theatre, pitting against one another the competing claims of intertwining ethnic exceptionalism, victimhood, and martyrdom, made for a fitting prelude to Yugoslavia’s break up along the same ethnic lines that once propped up the ideal of “Brotherhood and Unity” which held the country together. Mihailo’s agonizing past and the vengeful force it gives rise to not only analogize this jingoistic obsession with historical trauma, but also symbolically suggest that Yugoslavia is creeping towards a violent break up as bloody as Mihailo’s rampage at the end of

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<sup>319</sup> Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 181.

*Déjà vu*. By depicting those around Mihailo as never bothering to try to alleviate his anxieties and so possibly repair his psyche and restore his ability to tell apart the past from the present, the film symbolically suggests that the state itself is somewhat to blame for the Yugoslavs' obsession with historical trauma. Historical controversies should have been settled long ago through productive dialogue rather than glossed over and disguised by "Brotherhood and Unity" and its barely maintainable veneer of civility; old wounds would have been healed, and new and respectful interethnic relationships forged, the film implies, thus never allowing traumas to fester into time bombs metaphorized by Mihailo's character. The violent eruption of Mihailo's anger then is a unique example of the horror trope of *the return of the repressed* in the socialist context. It symbolically predicts that the citizens' disillusionment with the Yugoslav socialist system, already exacerbated by the economic crisis ravaging the country in the 1980s, having found its expression in the myths of collective ethnic victimhood provoked by unattended-to historical traumas, will develop into jingoistic posturing and explode into a catastrophic ethnic conflict.

Though it mimics the tropes of the American slashers, *Déjà vu* suffers less from the "incoherence" that dulls the slashers' political edge because Marković defuses and modifies those tropes, especially the contentious emphasis on Oedipal aberrations and misogynist fantasies of punishment for female sexual transgressions which he repurposes to indict the aberrations and transgressions of the Yugoslav political system. In "Her Body, Himself," Carol Clover outlines how the slashers construct their brutal fantasies and lists the most essential ingredients of the genre as psycho killers, promiscuous teen victims, houses that trap the victims, phallic cold weapons used by the killers, virginal female survivors, and shockingly graphic violence.<sup>320</sup> In the American slashers, the killer typically corners his victims in a house, termed

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<sup>320</sup> Clover, "Her Body, Himself," 194-204.



by Clover the “terrible place.”<sup>321</sup> Already steeped in horrific lore, usually connected to the killer’s own past, the house, although at first a safe zone, becomes a trap in which the killer re-enacts the site’s and/or his own past.<sup>322</sup> In *Déjà vu*, there are two locations which jointly make for a “terrible place”: Mihailo’s apartment where he endures daily reminders of his family’s tragic fate, and Olgica’s house where the murders occur and which has its own unsettling history. As in the American slashers, the “terrible place” provides insight into the killer’s psychology and motivations, and offers clues as to what the victims might symbolize (both to the killer and to the spectator). Olgica’s house is a site which she desperately wants to escape even before Mihailo’s rampage. The cavernous, oppressively-lit house where she lives in near-poverty with her alcoholic father and a sickly younger brother in desperate need of an expensive eye operation denotes not just Olgica’s dire economic predicament, but that of all Yugoslavs. With the (for a socialist country) near-profane images of the homeless gathered around a fire just outside the front door, the site bluntly illustrates the severity of the economic crisis of the 1980s when poverty was threatening to become a reality for many. The “place” is “terrible” because it houses a family living in shockingly un-socialist conditions and so hints that the economic crisis, not malice, leads Olgica to (manipulate) Mihailo and, consequently, to her demise.

The other half of the “terrible place,” Mihailo’s apartment which he shares with Stole and his family, “houses” Mihailo’s trauma and acts as a constant reminder of the injustice done to him by the state, barely allowing Mihailo to maintain his sanity. Only a credenza blocking the living room French door separates Mihailo from Stole who moved in on the same day Mihailo’s mother died. Stole and the credenza played a part in what was perhaps the most traumatic event

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<sup>321</sup> Clover, “Her Body, Himself,” 197.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

of Mihailo's life. In one of his more agonizing flashbacks, Mihailo recalls the day his mother succumbed to cancer. As he takes a glass of water to her, Mihailo's path is blocked by the credenza Stole and his friends had just brought in. The woman dies in agony as Mihailo, hearing her anguished screams, begs Stole to let him to pass through to comfort her. Years later, Mihailo has to put up with seeing the back of the credenza every day and has to listen to the torrent of abuse hurled at him from the other side of it by Stole who rails against the enemies of the state which include Mihailo to whom Stole refers as "that faggot" whenever he knows Mihailo is within earshot. The apartment is "terrible" because it torments Mihailo and hints that his violent breakdown, though incited by Olgica's sexual transgressions, has its origins in a tragic history of heartbreaking trauma caused by the state.

Like many slashers, *Déjà vu* features a killer who is still in "the grip of boyhood"—still subject to a deep Oedipal attachment—and whose rage is "propelled by psychosexual fury."<sup>323</sup> Though Mihailo ostensibly kills because the "loose" Olgica is unable to emulate his mother and so alleviate his anxieties, Mihailo's irrepressible anger is a result of the actions of the state. When Mihailo's mother divorces his philandering father, Mihailo, who seems to only find comfort in his mother's arms, chooses to live with her. He, however, almost instantly arrives at a crushing realization that his love is insufficient to keep his mother happy. Immediately following the divorce, Mihailo's mother attempts suicide by breaking a window and smashing her wrists against the shards of glass still protruding from the window pane. As his mother is restrained, little Mihailo walks up to the window and licks the blood as it streaks down the remaining window glass. The morbid gesture of tasting his mother's blood hints at Mihailo's bond to her,

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<sup>323</sup> Clover, "Her Body, Himself," 195, 194.

and foreshadows the carnage it “necessitates” at the end of the film.<sup>324</sup> Mihailo is indeed made into a monster by his family. The womanizing father and the alternately emotionally distant and coddling mother were bound to make Mihailo into an unstable adult. The family and so Mihailo’s sanity, however, were ultimately wrecked by the state’s actions which prevented Mihailo from getting past his Oedipal obsessions. The divorce may have removed the father as an immediate competitor for the mother’s affection, but the trial and the resulting death penalty removed him completely and forever. The state eliminated any possibility of Mihailo working through his mother fixation and becoming a healthy adult. Instead, it made him into a raging man-child stuck in a moment in the past. When, having selected Olgica as a mother-surrogate with whom to “reconstitute” the family unit, Mihailo realizes that Olgica is flirtatious and promiscuous and therefore more like his father, Mihailo’s psychic unity is shattered. When Olgica becomes involved with Zoran, the karate instructor at “Workers’ University,” Mihailo finally snaps. Mihailo’s realization that he cannot “save” Olgica (nor she him) is the final straw. Mihailo kills Olgica and others for what he sees as an unendurable repetition of the sense of loss he experienced upon the breakup of the “original” family unit.

While his victims are not teenagers suffering “postcoital death,” on the face of it as punishment for being prematurely sexually active, Mihailo’s rampage *is* set in motion by what he perceives as Olgica’s sexual transgressions.<sup>325</sup> A typical slasher interpretation might suggest that Olgica’s “punishment” is meant to satisfy the male viewer’s desire to see his patriarchal and puritanical worldview violently reasserted by a killer whose moral criteria he shares. An against-

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<sup>324</sup> Mihailo’s “taste for blood” is further encouraged by the sultry house maid. As Mihailo watches the maid slaughter a chicken in front of him, he licks the blood splattered over his lips. (Here, he also symbolically learns how to kill.)

<sup>325</sup> Clover, “Her Body, Himself,” 200. (only the term “postcoital death”)

the-grain one might identify the film's "incoherence" and suggest that the "punishment" is a symbolic indictment of the aberrations of Yugoslav socialism. Mihailo's murderous rage, unleashed on Olgica and on anyone who happens to be around, symbolically predicts for Yugoslavia a cataclysmic comeuppance for having built an anti-humanist society populated with desperate, maladjusted individuals (whose potential to resist the system Mihailo's rage also metaphorizes). Not realizing just how fragile Mihailo is, Olgica sets out to make the boy into a man, but, unfortunately for her, Mihailo's rite of passage includes putting him through an emotional run-around and eventually breaking his heart. Olgica is frustrated that Mihailo does not compliment her on her outfits; when he gives her flowers, she chastises him for "wasting money"; when, like a schoolboy, he gives Olgica a love note at work, she callously tears it up in front of him. Mihailo is devastated when he witnesses Olgica flirting with Zoran and encouraging his advances. The memory of catching his father groping the giggling house maid come flooding back in a torturous flashback and Mihailo begins to unravel, his pent-up anger bubbling to the surface as he realizes that his feelings have been disregarded by the "loose" Olgica much like his mother's were many years ago by her rake of a husband.

Markovi makes sure, however, that Olgica's "looseness" is qualified as a symptom of the defectiveness of the Yugoslav system, especially of the rampant economic crisis. The ramshackle "Workers' University," barely maintaining a veneer of functionality, symbolically hints at the absurdities of Yugoslavia's failing socialist system and at a complete disillusionment of the Yugoslavs with their country. The school offers everything from driving to modelling lessons and seems to exist solely for the misfits unable to prosper within the system who are eager to acquire additional qualifications in order to find employment and survive. Olgica's "looseness" is integral to her sudden outburst of ambition and its presence within this microcosm

of Yugoslavia is a symbolic disturbance of the status quo. It is a shocking attempt by a desperate ordinary citizen to “work” an unjust system and ensure her survival by whatever means necessary. The male students in the Esperanto class are unable to focus on the absurd task of learning to recite Petar Petrović-Njegoš’ famous poem, “The Mountain Wreath,” in the idealistic, but non-existent language because they are distracted by Olgica’s strutting in a far-too-short mini skirt just outside the classroom. When the instructors gather to discuss the possibility of “Workers’ University” becoming a candidate to organize an important cultural event, almost all are pessimistic about their ability to win the nomination as a rather detailed program of festivities needs to be prepared. To everyone’s surprise, Olgica rallies the faculty and volunteers Mihailo to play Chopin’s “Revolutionary Étude” at the event. That the instructors are initially lukewarm to Olgica’s idea suggests they understand they are living in a system within which one knows one’s place and simply performs the role of a happy socialist subject. Alluding to the system’s hierarchy of power and influence, the school director bluntly explains to Olgica that it had likely already been decided who would host the event and that competitive bidding is a mere formality. Yet, desperate Olgica manages to persuade them to try. She hopes that if the event is a success, as one of the organizers, she would be favoured to become a member of the League of Communists which would, in turn, put her on a fast-track to get a full-time job and a flat. When Mihailo struggles to get the Chopin piece right in the rehearsal sessions, afraid that her plan was already falling apart, Olgica gives Mihailo a cruel ultimatum: if the étude is not rehearsed to perfection in time for the event, she will never see him again. In Mihailo’s neglected skill as a musician, Olgica sees an opportunity to improve her life. It is the desire to escape the effects of the economic crisis, the “terrible house” in which she is trapped, that drives Olgica to use her

sexuality to heartlessly manipulate Mihailo and to futilely try to experience socialist prosperity that has already run out.

Fittingly then, Markovi gives Olgica's "looseness," perhaps precisely because of its causal relationship with Olgica's economic hardships, tangible political agency—the capacity to be a catalyst for dissent against the unjust system. Olgica openly admits to Mihailo that only sex allows her forget her miserable life. This "affliction" helps to sexually liberate Mihailo, but also facilitates his symbolic revolt against the system. When Mihailo is hesitant to take the always horny Olgica to his apartment for the first time, she insists and asks: "Who do you hide there, you old pervert?" Olgica's loud moaning during sex outrages Stole—the symbol of the injustice done to Mihailo and his family—whose theory about Mihailo's sexuality falls to pieces. When Stole's and his friends' drunken singing coming from the other side of the apartment annoys the brusque Olgica, she calls the men "peasant swine" and demands they shut up. Enraged, Stole shouts over the credenza, promising to kill the "slut" as Mihailo breaks down crying, realizing that the walls of his sheltered life are coming down. Olgica's "loose" presence in Mihailo's life is the agent that brings him into conflict with Stole whom he has had to tolerate—hide in his psyche—and appease for years, but will soon confront and so symbolically confront the system that has wronged both him and Olgica.

At first, Olgica's "looseness" so reinvigorates Mihailo that he plays the piano for the first time since his mother's death. Yet, he remains unsettled because he sees the ghost of his mother in Olgica who inadvertently plays up the resemblance. When Olgica, after rummaging through Mihailo's mother's closet, puts on an outfit the woman used to wear, shocked Mihailo can only stare at her in stunned silence. Uninterested in his emotional moment, Olgica callously insists that Mihailo give her the pendant which belonged to his mother to prove that he truly loves her.

Mihailo agrees, locking Olgica into the role of his mother-surrogate. Yet, Olgica's "looseness" also disturbs the Oedipal spell Mihailo is under by alerting him to his incestuous desire.<sup>326</sup> While making love to Olgica, Mihailo flashes back to a moment in his childhood when he walked in on his parents having sex. As Olgica moans in ecstasy just like Mihailo's mother did, the position of her body identical to that of his mother's on that day, Mihailo appears shocked by this uncanny repetition. Importantly, his horrified facial expression also suggests a deep shame upon recalling this moment when he began to resent his father. The event is "replayed" yet again, even more exactly, when Olgica's brother, Bobika, walks in on Mihailo and Olgica having sex, this time at her home. With a manifestation of his childhood self staring accusingly at him, the adult Mihailo seems to become aware for the first time of his incestuous desire for his mother. Facing "himself," and weeping from the shock and shame, Mihailo begins to realize that just like his mother never belonged to him, Olgica may not either.

With a brief period of happiness over, Mihailo is even more uneasy than before, hinting that he may soon break down and bring events to a violent and catastrophic conclusion. Unfortunately, his confidence is shattered just before the performance at "Workers' University." As the festivities celebrating the virtues of Yugoslav socialism begin, the sight of the crowded hall triggers in Mihailo the memories of his father's trial. In the flashback, teenage Mihailo, seated in the audience, observes as the prosecutor insists the actors could have and should have refused to work under the Nazis. The aggressive courtroom audience led by a young Stole clamors for death sentences for the frightened thespians. Recognizing him as the son of one of the actors, Stole comes face to face with Mihailo and shouts the famous Yugoslav Partisan slogan: "Death to fascism! Freedom to the people!" As the same slogan rings out in the packed

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<sup>326</sup> Olgica's "looseness" even symbolically indicts patriarchy by disturbing Mihailo's child-like understanding of how a woman should behave.

hall at “Workers’ University,” Mihailo shakes off the unwanted memory just before he is to walk onto the stage. Once he sits down at the piano, he is only able to utter, “I can’t,” before the Esperanto instructor awkwardly starts to recite “The Mountain Wreath” to the confused audience who laugh out loud at the absurdity of hearing the poem recited in a language no one understands.

That night Mihailo wakes up in agony, having replayed in his dreams the day he was prevented from being with his mother on her deathbed, his screams mimicking hers in her final moments. He finally reaches the breaking point and starts to bang on the French door that divides the apartment in two until the credenza behind it comes crashing down. Symbolically taking back what is his, Mihailo triumphantly enters Stole’s side of the apartment as Stole observes in utter amazement, realizing that Mihailo is no longer a timid loner he can push around, but a dangerous psychotic. Leaving the confused Stole behind, Mihailo heads to Olgica’s house. There, he first strangles the family dog and then kills Olgica’s father by pinning him to the bathroom door with a kitchen knife through the throat.<sup>327</sup> Shortly after Olgica and Zoran arrive, Mihailo attacks Zoran as he undresses while Olgica is in the shower. Mihailo first slashes Zoran across the chest with a sabre he finds in the house and then, when Zoran tries to utilize his karate skills, almost cuts his hand off. The hand dangles grotesquely as Zoran screams in pain and Mihailo cackles maniacally. Mihailo then uses the sabre to stab Zoran, now on his knees and crying for help. As almost every slasher killer does, Mihailo uses weapons that ensure “closeness and tactility” to murder Zoran and Olgica’s father, but not surprisingly reserves the closest contact for Olgica.<sup>328</sup> As the police barge into the house, having been alerted to the commotion

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<sup>327</sup> An apparent homage to John Carpenter’s *Halloween* (1978) in which Michael Myers kills Bob, one of the film’s doomed teenagers, by pinning him to a door with a kitchen knife.

<sup>328</sup> Clover, “Her Body, Himself,” 198. (only the phrase “closeness and tactility”)



by the neighbours, they hear muffled screams coming from the bathroom where Mihailo strangles Olgica, still in the shower, with his bare hands. Only Bobika escapes Mihailo's wrath. He emerges from a dark corner of the house as the police take Mihailo away and, like Mihailo after his mother's attempted suicide, gives the blood splattered over the door a taste as Mihailo grins approvingly.

Unlike most American slashers, *Déjà vu* does not depict violence particularly graphically. As Carol Clover suggests, slashers tend to take full advantage of advances in special effects "to show maiming and dismemberment in extraordinarily credible detail," the jarring shock of which, especially when it follows an understated build up, comes with a degree of campiness and self-parody and so causes the films to not be taken "seriously."<sup>329</sup> Though Zoran calling for his mother upon seeing his hand hang limply by a thread of skin makes for an almost farcical moment, it is also one of gruesomely poetic justice. For Zoran's hand, an all-too-obvious symbolic phallus, to be cut down with a weapon possessing an equally obvious phallic symbolism seems appropriate. Brimming with confidence for the first time ever, Mihailo reasserts his masculinity in a clash with a ladies' man who took Olgica away from him. Yet, as Mihailo administers a coup de grâce and finishes Zoran off, Markovi's camera is focused on Mihailo's grimacing face as if to remind the spectator that Mihailo's rage is righteous, not to be taken lightly, and about much more than petty male rivalry.

In an unusual case of intertwining tropes, Mihailo, like most slasher killers, leaves a legacy in the form of a "successor." Classic American slashers typically feature a "final girl" who, having come very close to death, is the only surviving witness to the horror. Smart,

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<sup>329</sup> Clover, "Her Body, Himself," 205.

practical, boyish, and atypical in that she restrains her sexuality, she manages to survive thanks to her ingenuity, and sometimes even exacts revenge on the killer.<sup>330</sup> *Déjà vu* features not a “final girl,” but a “final boy”—Olgica’s younger brother Bobika. It is Bobika’s character that Markovi utilizes particularly pointedly to indict the trend of wallowing in trauma and passing it on from generation to generation. The grown up Bobika only appears in the two brief sequences, one at the beginning and one at the end, situated in the film’s present. In the opening sequence, Bobika encounters the now aging Mihailo at a piano concert. Mihailo, who appears ancient *well* beyond his years, has been brought up from the mental institution, where he had presumably been placed following his killing spree, as an emergency replacement for the pianist who is unable to play that evening.<sup>331</sup> Stunned, Bobika cannot help the flood of grisly memories of the night he watched Mihailo kill his father and sister and mutters to himself, “Go on—remember everything,” before the film flashes back to the early 1970s. The film ends where it began, with ageing Mihailo playing piano on stage and Bobika observing him from the audience. (Unlike years before at “Workers’ University,” Mihailo performs flawlessly.) As his doctors take Mihailo away following the performance, Bobika squeezes in his hand the pendant that once belonged to Mihailo’s mother and Mihailo had gifted to Olgica as a token of his love. The film’s credits roll as Bobika sneaks up behind Mihailo, who is now wandering alone through corridors of the concert hall, summoning the courage to strangle Mihailo using the pendant chain.

Like the “final girl” in an American slasher, Bobika has a special connection with the monster, but also mirrors the monster as if predestined to become one himself. When Bobika walks in on Mihailo and Olgica having sex, he is “playing” Mihailo in a restaging of an incident

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<sup>330</sup> Clover, “Her Body, Himself,” 201.

<sup>331</sup> Mihailo’s appearance seems to be a reference to Grandpa from Tobe Hooper’s *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974)

from Mihailo's childhood. When Bobika licks the blood splattered over the living room door after the murders, he is echoing Mihailo's own reaction after his mother attempts suicide. The two seem to be the adjoining monsters in a chain of many created by the state. Like Mihailo, Bobika grows up in a highly dysfunctional home that falls apart when Mihailo goes on a rampage and effectively initiates Bobika into "monsterhood" by passing onto him the trauma and rage with which he had been "endowed" by the state. It is by "merging" Bobika's and Mihailo's characters then that the film perhaps most effectively "evokes the possibility of repetitive and imitative cycles of violence" when citizens are forced into "predetermined roles." In the opening and closing sequences, Bobika appears to be a maladjusted loner who prowls the streets and lurks in dark corners just like Mihailo used to and who might one day snap under the weight of his traumas just like Mihailo did. As he tries to embolden and incite himself to strangle Mihailo by repeating the words, "Do it. Now. Don't hesitate," Bobika observes Mihailo through a distorted fish-eye lens first-person perspective that up to now only Mihailo possessed.<sup>332</sup> By giving this subjective perspective, typical of slasher killers, to both Mihailo and Bobika, Markovi hints that the two are one and the same monster. The main body of *Déjà vu*, the content wedged in between the two sequences that take place in the present, can even be seen as Bobika's own flashback, symbolically suggesting that Bobika's trauma "contains" Mihailo's. The two monsters are integral to the same trauma, reflecting one another in a kind of *mise en abyme*, with Bobika now entrusted with the responsibility of keeping alive the traumatic memory and possessing the potential to further replicate the trauma. That the past is bookended by and

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<sup>332</sup> Early in the film, as he develops an interest in Olgica, Mihailo lurks around the "Workers' University" and secretly observes Olgica from dark corners of the building. Markovi gives Mihailo the typically slasher "predatory," subjective point-of-view (hand-held, darting camera movement mimicking human movement and perception, accompanied by the sound of heavy breathing) Carol Clover refers to as "I-camera." Clover, "Her Body, Himself," 190.

reverberates in the present ultimately implies then that the past destabilizes the present—unfolds *within* it as if it belonged there—symbolically alluding to the enduring and seemingly self-perpetuating obsessions with traumatic historical events unsettling the Yugoslavs in the 1980s.

Arguably, the politics of *Déjà vu* are obscured by the trappings of the slasher genre. Like many slasher killers, Mihailo is a psychopath whose rage is grounded in a kink in his psychosexual development and provoked by victims who appear to be incompatible with his moral universe. The Oedipal frustrations of a psychotic man may not seem, even metaphorically, to encapsulate aspects of the social and political climate of the 1980s Yugoslavia. Even when Mihailo's rage is given distinct political connotations which suggest that its true background is the mistreatment Mihailo and his family received at the hands of the state, the film's political concerns appear archaic. The specifics of that mistreatment—Mihailo's father's death sentence, based on flimsy evidence of collaboration with the Nazis and nationalization of the family's property that follows it—seem to suggest that Mihailo's rage articulates dismay at the bullish behaviour of the state towards the ideological misfits during post-war transition to socialism—more than forty years before. A look at how *Déjà vu* appropriates the slasher genre, especially at how Mihailo's victims, Olgica chief among them, differ from those of other slasher killers, however, reveals that the symbolism behind Mihailo's rage is neither archaic nor Oedipal, but rather concerns the imminent breakdown of the Yugoslav society. Though brash and “overly” sexual, Olgica is not a carefree teenager, but a desperate citizen almost as damaged as Mihailo himself. It is Olgica's desperate effort to escape her economic circumstances that drives her to use her sexuality to manipulate Mihailo and so provoke his murderous rage. Mihailo's anger at Olgica's failure to alleviate (or to even acknowledge his trauma) qualifies his murderous rampage as a metaphor for a catastrophic failure of the Yugoslav system that will come, the film

suggests, as a result of Yugoslav obsessions with traumatic historical events. Personified in Mihailo, this inability to let go of historical traumas is about to produce a carnage as bloody as Mihailo's. Crucially, however, through Olgica's character, *Déjà vu* implies that the trend of wallowing in resentment and bitterness over real and imagined past injustices is a byproduct of the economic crisis. Just as Mihailo's trauma, elevated into a mythical martyrdom and, in turn, into a reason to kill those who disregard it, finds an expression in Mihailo's killing spree, so will the Yugoslavs' obsession with historical trauma, spurred on by catastrophically poor economic prospects, eventually channel itself into a bloodshed. However seemingly "incoherent" then, *Déjà vu* pointedly and ominously predicts that the economic crisis ravaging Yugoslavia in the 1980s will ultimately result in a war likely to destroy the country.

## Conclusion

The mild optimism on the cusp of the new decade when the economic reforms seemed to be leading towards a recovery and Yugoslavia appeared to be a feasible prospect for EC membership was dashed when sporadic violence broke out in 1991. In hindsight, it is easy to see the signs foreshadowing the ethnic war that quickly followed, lasted five years, and engulfed much of Yugoslavia. The economic crisis and the devastating austerity measures seemed to prove that the state was unable to navigate the global economic waters. Tito's death in 1980 provided a deeply symbolic omen that Yugoslavia, too, might soon suffer the same fate. The EC's hesitance to welcome Yugoslavia into its fold likely exacerbated the effects of austerity measures, further undermining the authority of the federal government and, in turn, encouraging Slovenes and Croats to attempt join the EC without the "backward" parts of the country, especially without the Serbs they deemed inherently incapable of internalizing European cultural values and bent on taking over Yugoslavia while mercilessly crushing anyone who dared stand in

their way. The ongoing process of decentralization, too, had undermined the federal government and, ironically, destabilized the interethnic relationships. Arguably, Yugoslavia's statehood was being eroded for a democratic cause—the state was withering away as it was meant to—but the power seemed to go to the republican actors who were “completely unaccountable,” asserted their power increasingly without compromise, leaving the citizens “further disenfranchised.”<sup>333</sup> The Serbs were vilified for pushing for political and economic re-centralization and were portrayed by the Slovenes and Croats as being recklessly antagonistic in their efforts to entrench themselves in power. For its part, Serbia claimed that the Serb minority in Croatia was once again facing repression at the hands of increasingly hostile Croats nostalgic for the fascist NDH and that the Serbs living in Kosovo were already being openly being persecuted by the Albanians. By the end of the 1980s, the interethnic relationships were so tense that the “Brotherhood and Unity” of the Yugoslav Dream seemed a laughable phrase.

Together, *Maternal Half-Brothers*, *Dangerous Trail*, and *Déjà vu* are representative of the post-Tito era Yugoslav cinema in that they deal with the fallout of this infighting over the country's constitutional make up which they anticipate is going to further encourage ethnic nationalism, already severely exacerbated by the economic crisis, and result in a bloody ethnic war and possibly Yugoslavia's end. In examining the Yugoslav interethnic dynamics, *Maternal Half-Brothers* and *Dangerous Trail* reach far back into the history of the region. Both films indirectly engage with Ottoman imperialism which severed the Balkans from Europe and planted the seeds of future conflict and with Austro-Hungarian imperialism which, in seeking to contain the Ottoman threat, only further exacerbated ethnic animosities. Šotra's film examines how the Croats' resentment of the Serb “intruders,” who settled in Croatia after being offered land in

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<sup>333</sup> Vejvoda, “Yugoslavia 1945-91,” 16-17.

exchange for military service along the border between the Habsburg and Ottoman domains, which manifested itself during World War II when the NDH committed genocide on Serb population in its territory, still reverberated in the socialist Yugoslavia as practically a constituent element of the process of decentralization. The film voices the fear, prevalent among the Serbs, that Croatian “liberals” were Ustashe in-all-but-name. The film suggests that the *Croatian Spring*, in its efforts to decentralize Yugoslavia, promoted nostalgia for the NDH, encouraged “long-distance nationalism” and even terrorism among the “emigration” in order to destroy Yugoslavia which the movement disdained as a repressive edifice erected by and for the Serbs. In telling the story by intertwining the half-brothers’ subjective flashbacks, Šotra attempts to provide an objective insight into how the two ethnicities came to be in conflict. Maureen Turim suggests that there are “psychoanalytic implications” to flashbacks—they form a “case history” which the viewer interprets the way a psychoanalyst might interpret a patient’s dreams.<sup>334</sup>

Braco’s and Veselin’s versions of events that unfolded in the past are not antithetical to each other, but rather combine into a single more complete narrative. That narrative ultimately suggests that the two men most comfortably occupy the space where the two ethnically-inflected and supposedly mutually exclusive versions of history intersect rather than where they converge. The intermingled destinies of Braco and Veselin, which saw the two navigate Yugoslavia’s complex mixture of ethnic identities and their politics, are perhaps best interpreted as a “case history” of Yugoslavia, ultimately suggesting that ethnic nationalism is most harmful to those who, even if seduced by it, are unable to easily take sides.

Miomir Stamenkovič’s *Dangerous Trail* also deals with the difficulties involved in taking sides in ethnic conflicts as it examines the animosities between the Kosovo Serbs and

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<sup>334</sup> Turim, *Flashbacks in Film*, 18.

Albanians—one of the thorniest political issues in Yugoslavia. As in *Maternal Half-Brothers*, the subtext is the history of imperialism in the region and the process of Yugoslavia's decentralization. Kosovo's autonomy, achieved through Yugoslavia's constitutional reform in 1974, boosted Albanian irredentism, the film implies, and allowed it to consolidate its campaign of expulsion of the Serbs from Kosovo, in effect picking up the work commenced by the Ottomans in the fourteenth century and continued by the Ballists during World War II. In taking this position, *Dangerous Trail* sides with the view, taken for granted in Serbia, that the autonomy is merely a prelude to Kosovo's complete extrication from Serbia and Yugoslavia, soon to be "legitimized" by the Albanians' numerical advantage achieved by driving the Serbs out with intimidation and violence. Yet, the film does not portray Albanians as singularly hostile towards the Serbs and, as the conflict within Nafi's own family symbolically implies, suggest that irredentism is a movement whose merits should be re-evaluated by Albanians themselves because it divides them internally when they are faced with the difficult choice of taking sides. Like *Maternal Half-Brothers*, *Dangerous Trail* indicts the "emigration" whose nostalgia for some mythical Serb-free past spurs on and nurtures "long-distance nationalism" and terrorism. Although the state eliminates the immediate danger at the end of the film, *Dangerous Trail* ominously suggests that the threat remains and posits that Albanian irredentism should be curbed before a larger conflict breaks out the state will be powerless to contain.

Goran Markovič's slasher horror, *Déjà vu*, predicts just such a catastrophic end for Yugoslavia, inevitable precisely because of the trend of mining the past for wrongs to be righted in the present. Though it suffers from "incoherence" less than the 1970s and 1980s American slashers from which it derives, *Déjà vu*, too, as it transplants slasher tropes into the Yugoslav context, is somewhat ideologically ambiguous. Mihailo lashes out when his Oedipal desire does



not find satisfaction in the oversexed Olgica. In a classic American slasher, Mihailo's reaction might be interpreted as misogynistic and patriarchal moralizing—the “loose” female character is forced into obedience. Behind Mihailo's rage, however, is a history of injustice, regrettably not taken seriously by Olgica (or by anyone else around Mihailo) and that injustice is responsible for the carnage that unfolds at film's end. Mihailo's rage is a symbolic artifact of the past, “unearthed” in the present by a society that has reached an impasse. More specifically then, Mihailo's inability to come to terms with the injustice alludes to the historical traumas which were sources of animosity among Yugoslav ethnic groups in the 1980s and his killing spree suggest that those animosities are about to boil over. Crucially, Yugoslavia's economic crisis is firmly integrated into the reasoning behind Mihailo's rampage. Through the character of Olgica, manipulative because she is desperate to escape a life of poverty, the film suggests that the conduit for the trend of mining of history for evidence of injustice was the economic crisis which so frustrated Yugoslavs that it encouraged ethnic scapegoating. Suggesting that there will be no respite for Yugoslavia's problems—that victimhood mentality, spurred on by the economic crisis, will lead to violence—the film's apocalyptic finale prophesies chaos and self-destruction for Yugoslavia. Whatever “incoherence” the film might suffer from is perhaps fitting as it enables *Déjà vu* to mirror the “quandary of a civilization” mired in a bewildering cacophony of the competing claims of ethnic exceptionalism and victimhood, integral to the general confusion and turmoil engulfing the country in the 1980s.

Together then, *Maternal Half-Brothers*, *Dangerous Trail* and *Déjà vu* expose one of the most disastrous effects of global capitalism's reach into Yugoslavia's economy: the economic crisis which prompted some republics to give up on Yugoslavia and turn solely to ethnocentric politics, always likely to destroy the country. In their assessment of the sociopolitical

environment of the 1980s Yugoslavia, *Maternal Half-Brothers* and *Dangerous Trail* indirectly allude to the specter of Balkanism which made itself especially visible in the 1980s when Yugoslavia began to divide itself into the allegedly hopelessly economically backward and staunchly communist east, and the supposedly economically advanced and democratic west. Echoes of Aleksandar Rankovi 's ousting and of subsequent intensification of the processes of economic and political decentralization reverberate through *Maternal Half-Brothers* and *Dangerous Trail* via their depictions of how Yugoslav reforms encouraged, in parts of the country, anti-Yugoslav sentiments and a nostalgia for the pre-Yugoslav past while *Déjà vu* predicts that once the notion of Yugoslavism—the backbone of “Brotherhood and Unity” that ensured the country’ conceptual stability—completely disappears, so will Yugoslavia itself.

## Conclusion

### Back to the Front

As historian Dejan Jovi points out, in order to define the ever-evolving nuances of Yugoslavia's identity, the state had to define its main Others: "prewar Yugoslavism" (constitutional monarchy, liberal democracy, capitalist economy, class difference), abandoned following World War II and replaced with its socialist iteration, and "Soviet-style socialism" (extensive state bureaucracy which fully controlled all aspects of the economy and political life), abandoned after Tito's split with Stalin in 1948 when the doctrine of self-management and market socialism were introduced.<sup>335</sup> Locating Others in both communist East and capitalist West was the most symbolic as well as the most hazardous aspect of how Yugoslavia perceived and positioned itself. This commitment to what can be seen as a "third way" was cemented in 1961 when Yugoslavia—together with Egypt, India, and Indonesia—founded the Non-Aligned Movement, remaining its most-prominent member until the country's dissolution in 1991. As the Soviet Union weakened while itself pursuing reforms through the *perestroika* in the late 1980s, Yugoslavia's "third way" lost meaning because it no longer had one of its Others. What followed was an uneasy transition to capitalism, accompanied by an ambition to join the European family at perhaps the most opportune moment—when the European Community was being transformed into the even more binding European Union. Its many problems notwithstanding (a weak economy being the chief one), Yugoslavia seemed far better positioned to join the EU than any other European soon-to-be former communist state. Yet, ironically, a union of European peoples seemed to have no place in the *unifying* Europe.

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<sup>335</sup> Dejan Jovi, "Communist Yugoslavia and its 'Others'," in *Ideologies and National Identities: the case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, eds. John Lampe and Mark Mazower (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 281.

Even as the 1990s war approached, Yugoslavia's last Prime Minister, Ante Marković, believed that the country was to be a part of the European integrationist project. His economic reforms, implemented in 1989 and 1990, made it clear that "Yugoslav authorities had understood that their next step had to be a change of the system."<sup>336</sup> Though Yugoslavia actively pursued economic ties with the EC even at the height of the Cold War, the organization's cooperation always remained heavily conditioned on economic and political reforms. Although its geographic position and relative economic and political openness should have made Yugoslavia an ideal candidate, the EC continued to keep Yugoslavia at arm's length and no sincere effort to preserve the country's integrity was made by the organization.<sup>337</sup> Arguably, an offer of accelerated membership would have served as the strongest possible incentive for Yugoslav republics to negotiate an end to the political crisis and so avoid the war. Instead, as the more economically developed Yugoslav republics, Croatia and Slovenia remained the primary sites of interest for the EC. Surely not coincidentally, these were also the "civilized," Western-oriented Yugoslav republics that had already renounced socialism, began to embrace capitalism, and had always seen Yugoslavia as their prison, with the Serbs as its wardens.

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<sup>336</sup> Radeljić, *Europe and the Collapse of Yugoslavia*, 85.

<sup>337</sup> In retrospect, despite its problems, the late 1980s Yugoslavia should have been a serious (and perhaps the only formerly communist) prospect for EC membership because it *was* reforming its political and economic system. Accompanying Prime Minister Ante Marković's economic recovery program was a radical transformation of the republican communist parties, yet there seemed to be little interest within the EC in helping Yugoslavia along. The country was still not represented by an official delegation to the EC—it remained at the doorstep, still excluded from the elite company (the future EU) in the making. As Branimir Radeljić points out, "the Community was unfamiliar with the problems Yugoslavia was facing, while Yugoslavia was exempted from any concerns linked to the Community." Radeljić, *Europe and the Collapse of Yugoslavia*, 48. It was as if the EC was simply waiting for Yugoslavia to "wither away." Zachary Irwin points out that "EC-Yugoslav trade had increased consistently, by as much as 17 percent between 1987 and 1988 for a total of 38 percent of all Yugoslav exports." This, however, was insufficient to alleviate the effects of the economic crisis—a substantial financial assistance was desperately needed. It came in May of 1991 in the form of a promise of "some 730 million ECU shortly before Yugoslavia's crisis would descend into civil war." Irwin, "Yugoslavia's Relations with European States," 373.

Yugoslavia's rejection of the Soviets in 1948 served to appease not just the West, but also the west of the country, especially Slovenia and Croatia who saw the Russians as Serb allies and therefore as their "natural" antagonists. This fracture in Yugoslavia's unity was only temporarily narrowed, however, and became a gaping chasm in the years leading up to Yugoslavia's break-up when (mostly disingenuous) protestations to Western powers about Serbia were common in Slovenia and Croatia who claimed Serbia to be despotic, oppressive, and slow to reform.<sup>338</sup> Resurrecting those pre-Yugoslav "pet Balkan people" dynamics, at the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis, "Slovenes and Croats sought support in Austria, Germany and Italy, while the Serbs had a degree of consensus with the Russians."<sup>339</sup> Boris Yeltsin's Russia was, however, far too weak to be of any assistance to Serbia in championing the Yugoslav cause thus tipping the balance towards the emerging European superpower, Germany, who appeared to not want Yugoslavia integrated into Europe "proper" as single state and arguably facilitated the country's dismemberment into mini states. Branislav Radelji stresses that Yugoslavia's demise, more than being a result of the demise of communism, or a failure due to some innate Balkan dysfunction, was "achieved by a selective international recognition policy of its internal republics"<sup>340</sup> While some EC members (France, Great Britain, Greece, for example) were cautious and favoured approaches that ensured Yugoslavia's survival, Germany dismissed Yugoslavia as a legal entity

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<sup>338</sup> More than ever before, European identity was secured on the basis of proximity and an imagined kinship to Western Europe. The perpetual efforts by Slovenia and Croatia to prove their European credentials through—if being authentically European is impossible—being a barrier between the West and its Eastern Others (starting with Serbia) picked up speed as the country destabilized in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

<sup>339</sup> Radelji, *Europe and the Collapse of Yugoslavia*, 25. It is difficult to disregard that this dynamic was a resumption of past alliances. Croatia and Slovenia sought the help of former Axis powers—as they did in World War II—to escape Yugoslavia; the Serbs, whose reputation from two world wars as fierce fighters against historically aggressive states like Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire, afforded them some (though apparently not enough) respect from Britain and France, looked towards the staunchly anti-fascist Russians.

<sup>340</sup> Radelji, *Europe and the Collapse of Yugoslavia*, 26.

by first encouraging Croatia and Slovenia to declare independence and then lobbying, or rather insisting that other EC members recognize the new states.<sup>341</sup> The western-most and therefore least “Balkan” Yugoslav republics were seen as ready to depart the allegedly hopelessly backward eastern part of the Yugoslav federation and as the only ones suitable for eventual integration into the European family.

The ensuing war involved “humanitarian” military interventions by Western powers and left a legacy of continued economic and political instability in most of what used to be Yugoslavia, not to mention a complete breakdown of interethnic relationships—a sad ending to what was a viable solution for the South Slavs whose cultures Yugoslavism once synthesized. Ironically, the West saw the Yugoslav wars as revolting—shockingly incompatible with modern Europe—and the former Yugoslavs as bellicose slaves to mysterious historical traumas which warrant revenge rather than as having been led into war by outsiders who seemingly could not allow a “third way” country to remain standing. The most insidious aspect of this dynamic was the deepening of the “civilizational” fracture running between Yugoslavia’s east and west. The

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<sup>341</sup>A cynic might argue that Germany, the dominant EC state, made sure that Yugoslavia was not integrated into Europe “proper” as single state. Brislav Radelji suggests that it was the “activism of non-state actors” that had a great deal of influence on Germany’s apparent preference for Yugoslavia to break up. Radelji, *Europe and the Collapse of Yugoslavia*, 6. For instance, Radelji argues, that the Croatian and Slovenian diasporas lobbied various German political parties to, in turn, lobby the German government to take up the two Yugoslav republics’ causes of independence. This particular foreign policy matter became subject to intense internal pressure to take up the idealistic Wilsonian principles of self-determination and nation-building, and use this unique opportunity to improve Germany image by portraying the country as a champion of democracy, and as a humanitarian, principled, resolute future EU leader. As this issue was rather “soft,” not much was at stake in this approach—there was no imperative to take outside views into consideration, some of which were calling for an EC-wide non-recognition policy. Ultimately, faced with the possibility of some EC members not falling in line, Germany acted unilaterally and recognized Croatia and Slovenia as independent states, so ensuring Yugoslavia’s end. Indeed, the rest of the EC quickly followed Germany’s lead. For more on Croatia’s and Slovenia’s diasporas lobbying efforts in the EC (including, significantly, the Vatican), see Radelji, *Europe and the Collapse of Yugoslavia*, 93-168. Though difficult to verify, a popular claim within the Yugoslav breakup lore is that in exchange for cooperation on this issue Germany made mollifying promises to “difficult” EC members such as to allow an opt-out clause for Great Britain in the Maastricht Treaty, and to support Greece in its dispute with Macedonia. Radelji, *Europe and the Collapse of Yugoslavia*, 3.

Western drive to transform the Yugoslav economy into a capitalist one, a process which predisposed the western portion of the country for EC membership, “announced” the later disregard for the legitimacy of Yugoslav statehood as well as the NATO intervention against the Serbs—the side in the conflict most peripheral to Europe “proper.” The Serbs, who *did* lash out particularly violently against others during the war, had little to gain from Yugoslavia’s destruction as it was always going to see them dispersed among several newly-independent states. Yet, they were cynically deemed by the West to have been Yugoslavia’s sole destroyers whose hegemonic ways could simply no longer be tolerated and forced the hand of the democratic and progressive west of the country which *had to* secede.<sup>342</sup> This is a rather reductive interpretation of the roots of war and takes into consideration none of the nuances of Yugoslav political reality. The Serbs’ own nationalist paranoia, occasional bullishness and sense of entitlement notwithstanding, the more complete explanation is that the war came when manipulated Yugoslav peoples started to perceive their neighbours as their Others—when, while attempting to reorganize their post-communist social and political environment, they were presented with a false choice, East or West, forcing them to leave the “third way” behind.

Arguably, the Yugoslav Dream was tantamount to this balancing act between the global East and West as well as between the country’s east and west. Assessed this way, ironically, the Yugoslav Dream—manifested in the litany of adjustments to the political and economic

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<sup>342</sup> Playing on Western Russophobia (which, of course, incorporated anti-communist sentiments), media reports on the war almost invariably described Serbia as “a traditional Russian ally” whose preference for Yugoslavia to survive was alternately compared to Nazism and Communism (equals in the Western imagination)—a ploy to continue to subjugate non-Serbs desperate to secede from Yugoslavia and escape Serb hegemony. Discussing the proliferation of anti-Serb sentiments in Europe at the time, Diana Johnstone points out that “by portraying Serb attachment to Yugoslavia as an aggressive nationalist plot to create ‘Greater Serbia’, the secessionists transformed this obstacle into an asset. Serbs’ desire to stay in Yugoslavia was transformed into the main argument for destroying it.” Johnstone, *Fool’s Crusade*, 124. The Western media seemed to accept this assessment and used it to “Nazify” the Serbs by depicting them as bloodthirsty and “genocidal.” Subsequently, the Serbs became the sole guilty party in almost all discourse about the Yugoslav wars.

systems—is what made Yugoslavia far too geopolitically ill-defined and therefore susceptible to being destabilized both from without and from within. The difficulty with making Yugoslavia’s “third way” work—a struggle perhaps best defined by the opposition between Milovan Djilas’ democratic socialism and Aleksandar Rankovič’s hardline authoritarianism—is the somewhat obscured dialogical thread that runs through this dissertation. It was the *Black Wave* filmmakers who first, however obliquely, engaged with the notion of lack of clarity as to what precisely Yugoslavia was by suggesting that the New Class thrived *because* it had perfected the performance of the balancing act. *Black Wave* films I analyze imply that political elites count on such murkiness to allow them to finesse the system—to materially benefit while insisting on their own irreplaceability as experts at “third way” without implementing tangible changes because the system could not be altered without upsetting the balance between East and West (and east and west). The films suggest that the positions of such elites remained safe because the system rewarded those who propped it up and allowed the country to navigate that much longer the global political and economic dynamics.

The focus of Živojin Pavlovič’s *Ambush* on the cusp period immediately after World War II symbolically suggests that the country remains in transition and always amidst reforms, forever suspended between the “old” and “new”—between East and West—never fully crossing over into either camp. In Pavlovič’s *When I’m Dead and Gone*, the anxiety about the future of the younger generation is embodied in the character of Jimmy whose hopes of escaping impoverishment are without any potential to succeed because they are halted from above—because some class difference is expected in a system which is borderline capitalist. As ordinary citizens navigate the pseudo-socialist environment with great difficulty and subordinate anew whenever political and economic “reforms” take place, the elites easily adjust to and play



whatever roles are necessary in order to remain in power. Through a Reichian assessment of totalitarianism as rooted in sexual repression, Dušan Makavejev's *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* mocks revolutionary romanticism of socialist societies—their pedagogical overtones, and their drive to indoctrinate and/or rehabilitate their subjects. In *WR*, benign romantic revolutionaries are but a reform removed from the old-fashioned authoritarians who shun physical love and prefer power and material possessions. Unlike *WR* which maintains a smug distance as if to avoid getting “dirty,” Želimir Žilnik's *Early Works*, though no less smug, is more radical and formulates its critique of the system as a direct involvement in the political environment.<sup>343</sup> Yet, perhaps the film is less keen to expose its own ideological construct, or to put on display its conviction that to *directly* point to injustice is to *directly* contribute to democracy than it is to suggest that it is unclear to the citizens of Yugoslavia what exactly socialism is.

That *Black Wave* was acclaimed in the West, in part for being in synergy with the Marxist humanist philosophers of the *Praxis School* who challenged the Yugoslav establishment to transform the country into a more liberal and democratic polity, itself speaks to Yugoslavia's culturally and politically liminal existence somewhere in between East and West. The 1968 student demonstrations in Yugoslavia, which paralleled similar unrest around Europe, denouncing conservative values and demanding input into how countries are run by younger generations, were quite accurately seen as being in alignment with *Black Wave* filmmakers whose films asked that Yugoslav leaders be open to constructive criticism rather than be made

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<sup>343</sup> Discussing the era, Žilnik is eager to identify Aleksandar Petrović and Živojin Pavlović, the first generation of *Black Wave* directors who adapted the work of novelists and worked with screenwriters connected to the communist nomenclature, as too close to the Yugoslav establishment, asserting that he and others of his generation (about a decade younger) distanced themselves completely from the state and, as a result, made films more pointedly critical of the system. Kirn, Sekulić, and Testen, “Those who Make Revolutions,” 62.

untouchable by the cult of World War II, the memory of which was routinely used as a means of legitimization of authoritarianism. Filmmakers like Žilnik, Makavejev, and Pavlović explicitly questioned the entitlement of old-school communist functionaries to be the absolute authority on all matters pertaining to Yugoslavia's development. Put differently, they could not help but rebel against the dogmatism that had not gone away with Tito's break with Stalin. They demanded more Djilas and less Ranković—a more democratic Yugoslavia, unstifled by the masters of pseudo-reforms which maintained Yugoslavia's balancing act.

Making this balancing act work meant acquiescing to Western (and western) demands for political and economic reforms which implicitly involved a reassessment of what kind of socialist country Yugoslavia was to be—one whose economy was guided by the global capitalist market or one in which the Yugoslav producers themselves made all decisions pertaining to the matters of economy. Market reforms not only contradicted and effectively dismantled the workers' self-management system almost as quickly as it was implemented, leaving the workers with no voice in a system meant to be their own, but also involved ethnically-inflected concerns, putting additional emphasis on that “civilizational” fracture running through the middle of the country. Zoran Tadić's *The Dream About a Rose* and Živko Nikolić's *In the Name of the People* bluntly put on display the results of the succession of reforms which eroded the very foundation of the Yugoslav socialist system, including the economic model based on social rather than state property and, most egregiously, the workers' self-management system. Vlatko Gilić's *Backbone*, and Goran Marković's *Variola Vera* both hint at the disillusionment and despair at the economic crisis as well as at the internal discord that resulted from the country's attempts to enter the global economy—a process which first necessitated excessive borrowing from the IMF and World Bank and later a course of austerity measures. Krsto Papić's *The Rat Saviour* points to the

frustration with the cycles of reforms which never seemed to make the economy any better and were, in any case, the domain of the New Class—the imposters who ruled the country on false premises—busy enriching themselves the way political elites do in Western societies.

Filip Robar-Dorin's *Rams and Mammoths*, however, hints at the gravest of consequences of the destruction of the workers' self-management system. The loss of the modern, progressive ideal of equality around which all, regardless of ethnic identity, could coalesce seemed to facilitate a swift regression into ethnic consolidation. The failure of the hallmark of Yugoslav socialism, coupled with deep disillusionment over the economic crisis, seemed to ensure a division between the country's east and west, with the latter seeing the way out of the crisis in extricating itself from association with the former and joining the West. As sociologist Duško Sekuli suggests, "the process of European integration [...] made Europe attractive for the reform-minded, communist leaders of Slovenia and Croatia" who sought ways to join the club and leave the allegedly hopelessly backward east behind.<sup>344</sup> This inherently Balkanist dynamic mimicked the Western view of the East as politically and economically backward. As Andrew Hammond suggests, the perception of backwardness and the resulting division were amplified by the country's "entrance into a globalizing economy"—a process that could not but leave portions of Yugoslavia behind.<sup>345</sup> Being a part of the world economy, however marginally, meant that global economic upheavals, especially the oil crises of 1973 and 1979, affected Yugoslavia as well. The resulting debt and the austerity measures converged to make Yugoslavia's 1980s economic decline staggeringly fast and, in turn, the desire of the country's west to leave Yugoslavia for Europe "proper" that much more urgent. Put differently, Yugoslavia was brought

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<sup>344</sup> Sekuli, "The Creation and Dissolution of the Multinational State," 175.

<sup>345</sup> Andrew Hammond, "The Uses of Balkanism," 617-618.

to the brink by the “crisis of Fordism in western capitalism” that caused a “debt crisis which was manifested in declining real incomes, hyperinflation [...] unemployment, economic stagnation, and balance of payment problems” [...] followed by “the suppression of domestic consumption [which] only served to translate the debt crisis into a political crisis.”<sup>346</sup>

Even without the added stress of the economic crisis, a major part of Yugoslavia’s balancing act was the ever-precarious negotiation of sentiments of ethnic exceptionalism and attendant animosities which typically implied divergent allegiances of different ethnic groups either to the East or to the West. Not surprisingly, such sentiments were handled cautiously and, as Susan Woodward points out, were “institutionalized,” that is managed via “an extensive system of rights and overlapping sovereignties.”<sup>347</sup> The global rivalry between East and West still played out on a smaller scale in Yugoslavia, most intensely as a rivalry between the Serbs and the Croats. The points of contact between the two, especially within Croatia proper, seemed to mirror the parent rivalry in that they resulted in an uneasy coexistence—as if there was an unbridgeable chasm between the two and as if each somehow connoted “their” sides, with the Serbs “playing” the role of the East and the Croats “performing” the West. Though absurd, this was not an entirely surprising predicament because, as Misha Glenny points out, the Krajina Serbs effectively provided a buffer zone between “the empires of Islam and Christendom for three centuries” as well as acted as the “line of fissure [...] between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christian faiths.”<sup>348</sup> The trend of appeasing the West as well as alleviating the fears of Yugoslavia’s west about the Serbs’ affinity for the Russians, which started with Tito’s break with

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<sup>346</sup> Phillips and Ferfila, *The Rise and Fall*, 87-88.

<sup>347</sup> Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, 45.

<sup>348</sup> Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia: the Third Balkan War*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 6.

Stalin in 1948, was fine-tuned throughout Yugoslavia's existence in the form of constitutional reforms which entailed concessions to the western republics. Appeasing those who feared Serbia's nationalists with the 1974 Constitution which weakened Serbia by giving autonomy to two of its regions with large minority populations while not taking the opportunity to afford the Serbs living in Croatia a similar status, made the constitutional reform an oddly partisan gesture, deeply resented by the Krajina Serbs who felt—with some justification—that *they* needed protection because a rehabilitation of the NDH was under way.

How this alleged civilizational chasm between the global East and West is performed by the Serbs and the Croats—between Yugoslavia's east and west—is the subtext of Zdravko Šotra's *Maternal Half-Brothers*. The film assesses the Croat view that it is intolerable that the Serbs would even be present in Croatia let alone be a part of the cadre of its state apparatus as an attitude validated by the Western view that the East is inherently hegemonic. The film suggests that the NDH ideology did not disappear after World War II ended but was, in fact, perpetuated among the Croats and functioned to establish a belief that the Serbs are underhanded opportunists who diluted not just the ethnic homogeneity of Croat territories, but the Croats' very ability to be Western. The film implies that ethnic exceptionalisms were perhaps overly "institutionalized" in order to appease the West as well as the country's west, both of which insisted on political and economic decentralization. The film directly links the anti-Yugoslav and anti-Serb sentiments of the by-definition Western "long-distance nationalism" with the decentralizing reforms which seemed to implicitly give credence to the view that the Serbs have indeed polluted Croatia by their very presence. The memory of the crimes of the NDH became a hot-button issue in the 1980s because the Serbs deemed that the Croats have remained Nazi sympathizers, lying in wait until the opportunity presented itself to secede from Yugoslavia and

to expel the Serbs from the territory of Croatia. This view implied that in being pro-reform, the Croats were simply performing Western “democratic” values while rehabilitating, assisted by the state, the NDH without any regard for how traumatic the memory of World War II was for the Serbs. Ultimately, Šotra’s film is a warning that Yugoslavia’s interethnic relationships are dangerously poisoned because decentralization has allowed the West to inspire in Yugoslavia’s west jingoistic dreams of ethnically pure nation states—because there has been too much Djilas and not enough Rankovi .

Like *Maternal Half-Brothers*, Miomir Stamenkovi ’s *Dangerous Trail* implies that the West is complicit in the project of destabilization of socialist Yugoslavia. The film suggests that Yugoslavia’s very existence is seen by some ethnic groups as an affront to their identity and an obstacle to freedom and that the attempts by the state to provide conciliatory solutions in order to not be perceived as Serb-dominated only encouraged separatism and irredentism and, in turn, created resentment among the Serbs who saw themselves as the victims of this policy of appeasement. This lapse in judgement occurred, the film implies, because authoritarians like Aleksandar Rankovi became pariahs once Western-style reforms began to be implemented and their hardline methods of suppressing ethnic nationalism (and outright dismissal of claims of oppression) came to be seen as excessive and counter to the liberal drive of the reforms. Arguably, decentralization was effectively “institutionalizing” Yugoslavia’s dissolution. Kosovo’s autonomous status within Serbia was one of the most hotly debated topics in Yugoslavia partly because it was understood that the autonomy was the initial step towards Kosovo’s independence and eventual integration into Albania (without the consent of the Serbs, obviously, and after expelling them from the area entirely). The film ultimately suggests that

Albanian irredentism is a Western import, brought in via reforms and disguised as a concern for the health of the country's democracy.

The lack of consensus on Yugoslavia's constitutional make up was, rather predictably, always going to lead to the kind of carnage hinted at in Goran Markovi 's *Déjà vu*. The country's western republics pushed for decentralization and looked for ways to ensure ethnic purity of their territories while claiming that the system facilitated curtailment of their ethnic and cultural heritage and economic prosperity in favour of the Serbs. The Serbs aimed to preserve the country as they saw that dissolution would inevitably result in bloodshed not unlike the one of World War II and tirelessly whipped up paranoia regarding the fate of the Serbs living outside of Serbia in the event of a break up. If *Maternal Half-Brothers* and *Dangerous Trail* suggest that constitutional reforms facilitate ethnic consolidation and an easy way for an ethnic group to locate its Others, *Déjà vu* fittingly "sees" the outcome, the breakdown of the system and an ethnic war, as a result of a conflation of the present and the past. The constitutional reforms were a step back in time of sorts—towards the archaic Western-style nation states which are almost always violently carved out. Mihailo, "frozen in infantile fury"—in his own past—cannot express his frustration except through violence.<sup>349</sup> His violent rampage can therefore be seen as a symbolic return to the pre-Yugoslav era of open ethnic antagonism—a move back in time seemingly necessitated by the failure of Yugoslavia's "third way."

South Slavs were united by the Yugoslav idea in order to avoid being dominated by colonial powers whose legacy in the region has been one of ethnic discord, so it seems ironically fitting that the country would be undone by neocolonial powers and by the ethnic discord they produced. Yugoslavia's gradual economic collapse of the 1970s and 1980s, caused by the

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<sup>349</sup> Clover, "Her Body, Himself," 195. (only the phrase "frozen in infantile fury")

country's unwise—though perhaps unavoidable—policy of acquiescing to the West, which coincided with the emergence of ethnic nationalism, confirmed that Yugoslavia could not, after all, shake off the clutches of economic neocolonial servitude. Yugoslavia disintegrated, in part, because it could not “solve the economic crisis of the 1980s thus preventing the ethnic and regional grievances from being resolved and allowing them to accumulate to the point where a national policy of economic reform became impossible.”<sup>350</sup> Making matters worse, once the Soviet Union began to weaken in the 1980s, Yugoslavia's “third way,” as Duško Sekuli points out, ceased to be of benefit to the West because Yugoslavia was no longer a “communist dissident,” and “without outside pressures to hold it together, no charismatic leadership, and with no possibility of creating and sustaining internal legitimacy, because of the crisis of communism and the deteriorating economic situation, [Yugoslavia] simply exploded.”<sup>351</sup> The country's formerly communist elites which degenerated into ethnic nationalists in the late 1980s and early 1990s in order to remain in power and ultimately led Yugoslavia into a senseless war are not the only ones responsible for that war. Above all, Yugoslavia was undone by neocolonial meddling that went on for most of the country's existence which exacerbated ethnic discord “planted” by the colonial powers dominating the region long before Yugoslavia even existed.

Yugoslavism emerged as a potential solution for those whom hegemonic empires—past and present—regarded as inconsequential. Its politics were modern, inclusive, humanist, anti-imperialist, and its attempt at synthesizing a South Slavic culture as judicious as it was bold. Making the Yugoslav idea work in practice was clearly a difficult, and ultimately impossible, undertaking, especially after the catastrophe of World War II which nevertheless provided an

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<sup>350</sup> Phillips and Ferfila, *The Rise and Fall*, 86.

<sup>351</sup> Sekuli, “The Creation and Dissolution of the Multinational State,” 176.



opportunity for the Yugoslav idea to be put into practice while “rolled into” communism whose internationalist bend found its minor equivalent in the supra-national Yugoslavism. I hope that my analysis of the thirteen works of Yugoslav cinema makes plain my view that Yugoslavia’s failure does not invalidate the Yugoslav idea (or socialism), nor does it suggest that Yugoslavs were inherently incapable of peacefully coexisting—a Balkanist suggestion still routinely made in the West. If this dissertation implicitly validates or shows admiration for any formerly Yugoslav political movement, it would be the Croatian “Illyrians” of the nineteenth century whose progressive doctrine shunned petty nationalism and aimed to unify the South Slavs trapped within Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman domains, and whose legacy was often paid lip service to but only occasionally authentically upheld during the existence of the socialist Yugoslavia. Conversely, I am implicitly critical of those forces which defaulted to petty nationalism and sought to thoughtlessly destroy Yugoslavia no matter the consequences. Overall, my strategy in this dissertation was to identify the mechanism behind Yugoslavia’s failure (the type of inquiry that has so far been reserved for the social sciences) as a contentious rather than agreed upon issue and to, via analysis of Yugoslav cinema, advance debates around it in a direction that redeems the Yugoslav idea. What I meant to accomplish then was to not only contribute to the knowledge base around Yugoslav cinema, but also to alter the reader’s understanding of what he/she might have previously viewed as stable knowledge about Yugoslavia itself. Ultimately, it is my hope that this work bolsters the rather underwhelming amount of scholarship on Yugoslav cinema by bringing attention to films previously undiscussed (or barely discussed) and helps develop it in a direction free of anti-communist paranoia and Balkanist stereotypes. For me, it forms the blueprint for future research and further inquiry into Yugoslavia and its cinema.

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